SPECIAL CONVENTION ISSUE

THE Nation.

DOUBLE ISSUE

SEPTEMBER 1/8, 2008
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Letters

The Affordable-Housing Test

Chicago
Connie Schultz gets it spot-on with "The Waitress Test" [July 14]. Class issues and identity politics (in this case, feminism) are inextricably intertwined, not pitted against each other, as too many commentators insist. One thing Schultz doesn't mention is affordable housing. Whether it's rental housing, public housing or homes owned, working- and middle-class people—especially single women with children—are finding it increasingly impossible to secure themselves domestically.

Beauty Turner, one of Chicago's leading public-housing activists, speaks often of her experience as a woman who fled domestic violence and found affordable sanctuary in public housing. Now public housing is being torn down to open up land for developers; affordable rental housing is virtually impossible to find in gentrifying African-American and poor white neighborhoods; homeowners who purchased their homes fifteen, twenty or more years ago are being squeezed out by escalating property values and tax rates.

As Schultz reminds us, domestic violence and familial abandonment (usually by men) go hand in hand with economic and social desperation. The women and children left behind need safe, affordable places to live. Hillary Clinton did not address this issue; Barack Obama hasn't either. It's a crucial one, and he would benefit politically and morally if he did.
David G. Whiteis

Siding With Mitchell

Orinda, Calif.
I read and re-read Kai Wright's "The Subprime Swindle" [July 14], and I can only say, "Boohoo." Wright picked the wrong example, as George Mitchell is the poster child for those who should *not* be bailed out. He did not alter his spending after a significant loss of household income and signed loan papers without understanding them—again and again. Mitchell is a victim of… George Mitchell. When you make bad decisions, there is a price to be paid. Wright's attempt to conflate race and age with victimhood was laughable given the facts.
Doug Knauer

Greensburg, La.
I recommend a drastic and consumer-oriented solution: all subprime and prime mortgages, as well as all credit card debt with greater than 5 percent interest made between 1993 and 2008 be erased from the books. That's right—I am advocating sinking the ships of the credit card and lending industry to save the rest of the fleet. If they don't like it, too bad. It was their racism, sexism and greed that got us into this mess. It doesn't take a financial expert to know that 29.99 percent interest and balloon payments will net defaults, not paid-off loans. The industry wrote those loans to fail. It should not be rewarded for deploying such weapons of mass destruction.
Ash Smith

Dover, N.H.
The $68,000 loan the Mitchell family took out in 2003 for siding was not only a loan they should never have had foisted on them; it was for at least eight times what siding should have cost for the house shown on your July 14 cover. If the Mitchells paid more than $8,000 for materials and labor for vinyl siding in 2003, they were rooked not only by the loan terms but by the cost of the job.
Carole S. Appel

Double-Issue Doublespeak

Knoxville, Tenn.
A letter writer in the August 4/11 issue playfully takes *The Nation* to task for "doublespeak worthy of the Bush Administration" for announcing the return of Frank W. Lewis's crossword puzzle as a "weekly" feature just as you shift to your biweekly summer schedule. Then a friend noted the words Double Issue on the cover, assessed its heft and declared it no bigger than usual. Calling your biweekly offerings "double" issues, with the same

letters@thenation.com

(continued on page 38)

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For a New Economics

There is more to fear than fear itself as the 2008 electoral calendar turns from a summer silly season of debates over tire inflation to a fall when voters will charge a President and Congress with cleaning up the economic mess we've fallen into. The details are all too painfully enumerated. Housing foreclosures in June were up 50 percent compared with the same month in 2007, and we still haven't hit the worst of the credit crunch. Gas prices have risen 33 percent over the past year, and heating oil is expected to rise by 60 percent. Food prices, up 4 percent last year, are rising at the fastest rate in almost two decades. As the cost of living skyrockets, opportunities to make a living are disappearing. Employers announced plans for 103,000 job cuts in July—a 141 percent increase over the previous July. A downturn that began in the housing and financial sectors has spread throughout the economy.

EDITORIAL

The crisis may be uneven—a "downturn" in some states, a recession in Michigan—but it is national in character. A Rockefeller Foundation/*Time* survey found that 85 percent of Americans think we're headed in the wrong direction; the majority say the American Dream "is no longer attainable."

The response of John McCain is no response at all. The GOP contender admits to his own economic ignorance, takes counsel that dismisses worries about keeping homes and jobs as "whining" and threatens to do more than Bush to dismantle regulatory and safety-net protections. Democrats who gather in Denver to nominate Barack Obama should be trouncing Republicans who promise more of the same and maybe worse. Yet polls portray a close presidential race.

What gives?

Obama, under pressure to avoid appearing "liberal," errs too frequently on the side of caution. And because presidential candidates define the debate, Obama's populism deficit constrains Democrats even as Americans demand more than mere "hope." The Rockefeller/*Time* survey found almost 80 percent believe that the social contract they could once depend on has deteriorated and say they want a new one.

The tepid platform Democrats will adopt in Denver is not a new social contract, but it does go places Republicans never will. Because of popular mobilization, it calls for strengthening rather than privatizing Social Security and embracing the healthcare guarantee proposed by Progressive Democrats of America and the California Nurses Association. And a push from the Citizens Trade Campaign and its union allies strengthened sections on trade policy and on the right of workers to organize.

But this document still pulls too many punches. Obama and the Democrats should do more to distinguish their agenda from McCain's empty rhetoric. Popular longing for a new economics creates what the late Paul Wellstone called a "teaching moment." The Democrats should seize it and present a bold governing program—the Apollo Alliance plan for energy independence, detailed infrastructure programs that emphasize smart growth and sustainability, industrial and farm policies that invest in job creation, and health and retirement guarantees to provide all Americans with security. It is not enough to hint at good intentions.

Americans are ready to rally behind the idea that government can be a part of the solution to our economic woes. As we argue in this special issue, these times demand a popular movement on behalf of a vision as bold as the New Deal, Fair Deal and Great Society, whose Democratic supporters won not just the White House but sufficiently robust Congressional majorities to turn the ship of state off the crash course charted by previous George Bushes and John McCains.

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NEWS & ANALYSIS

Dave Zirin: Blogging the Olympics

Hillel Schenker: The tragedy of Ehud Olmert

Margarita Akhvlediani: War in Georgia

Barbara Ehrenreich: When pastors go postal

DEMOCRATS IN DENVER

Complete coverage

VIDEO NATION

Choosing a President

PODCASTS

Nation conversations

Blood in the Caucasus

> "The past week's events in South Ossetia are bound to shock and pain anyone.... Nothing can justify this loss of life and destruction. It is a warning to all."
>
> —Mikhail Gorbachev, *Washington Post*, August 12

Former Soviet President Gorbachev's condemnation of Georgia's assault on Tskhinvali on the night of August 7, which precipitated the larger Russia-Georgia conflict, reminds us that if we had heeded his vision of a truly post–cold war world, we might not today be confronting such dangerous geopolitical gamesmanship. It should also remind us, as a wobbly cease-fire is put in place, that the conflict has been flagrantly misreported in this country.

COMMENT

I am heartsick at the violence and brutalities on all sides. Georgian, South Ossetian and Russian friends have all suffered. Yet commentary in the US media, almost without exception, has turned a longstanding, complex separatist conflict into a *casus belli* for a new cold war with Russia, ignoring not only the historical and political reasons for South Ossetia's drive for independence from Georgia but also the responsibility of Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili for the current crisis. So eager have commentators been to indict Vladimir Putin's Russia that they have overlooked Washington's contribution to the rising tensions.

Certainly Russia should be condemned for escalating the fighting beyond what was necessary to defend South Ossetians and Russian peacekeepers. But the US media have failed to provide the full backdrop. For one, the role of Saakashvili—who has sought to provoke Moscow over a range of issues in recent years—has been whitewashed. Georgia's president has often seemed more intent on currying favor with the Bush Administration, which has strongly supported Georgia's bid for NATO membership, than on looking after the interests of his people. The United States has also sent hundreds of military advisers to Georgia and welcomed Georgian troops in its "coalition of the willing" in Iraq. The irony is that the Bush Administration, which violated Iraq's sovereignty, now feigns outrage over Russia's actions. And for all the flowery talk of promoting Georgia's democracy, the Bush Administration has in the past year downplayed Saakashvili's violent crackdown on Georgian protesters, as well as his rigged election, declaration of martial law, attacks on opposition media and jailing of opponents.

In intervening militarily to protect South Ossetians and Russian peacekeepers, Moscow suggested it was following the precedent of Washington's 1999 war against Serbia. And just as Washington widened that war beyond the Kosovo theater to attack Serbia's infrastructure, Russia expanded its war, hitting targets in Georgia proper, thereby challenging the UN Charter. By doing so, Moscow is warning that NATO expansion on Russia's borders will not be tolerated.

There are also unasked questions about the conflict's eruption. Was Saakashvili's military strike designed to force NATO's hand after its hesitant endorsement of future membership for Georgia? Did the Bush Administration's public support of Saakashvili's belligerent stance toward Russia convince the Geor-

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gian president that he would have US backing if he attacked?

Such questions have been virtually ignored amid the relentlessly one-sided commentary, with critics like William Kristol and Robert Kagan drawing hysterical parallels with Munich in 1938, and Clinton Administration diplomat Richard Holbrooke issuing a truculent demand in the *Washington Post* that Russia pay a price. Yet calls for sanctions or boycotts are hollow. Even if the United States were not already stretched to the breaking point in Iraq and Afghanistan, Bush Administration policies have left us with no credibility in Moscow and, therefore, little diplomatic leverage. That is why it was left to the European Union, despite its internal divisions, to arrange a cease-fire and advance a framework for resolving the conflict.

Yet crises like these also present opportunities. If the cease-fire holds, it should create the space for a different US policy toward Russia and its neighbors. A new approach must begin with recognition of Georgia's sovereignty but also recognize that Russia has legitimate interests along its borders and in areas that have been its traditional zones of security, from Central Asia to the Caucasus to Ukraine. And having established a precedent in supporting Kosovo's independence, Washington should work with Russia to set up a process, monitored by the UN, that could likewise lead to South Ossetia's and Abkhazia's eventual independence. This could establish the basis for a more cooperative US-Russia relationship that would also be in the interests of the Georgian people. As Mark Ames points out in a companion article at thenation.com, this conflict exposes a clash between two fundamental principles of international relations: the right of nations to control territory within their borders versus the right of peoples to self-determination. The West cannot simply claim the precedence of one principle (self-determination in Kosovo, for example) and then assert that of the other (national sovereignty in Georgia) without exposing its own hypocrisy and motivations based on power politics.

A key element in a new security paradigm must include a US commitment to end eastward expansion of NATO, especially to Georgia and Ukraine. In return, Washington and Moscow should jointly guarantee the sovereignty of those two countries. NATO expansion has furthered no one's security—in fact, it has increased regional tensions, aroused Russian insecurity and hostility, and discouraged countries from pursuing independent relations with Moscow, leading them instead to adopt provocative policies and act, at times, like virtual US colonies.

Worryingly, neither US presidential candidate has given a hint of being willing to rethink policy toward the region. While Obama argues for UN mediation and the importance of finding a settlement, both he and McCain support NATO membership for Georgia. (McCain is, of course, far more bellicose, tied as he is to ultra-neocons who demand that Georgia's—and Ukraine's—NATO membership be expedited and that Russia be excluded from the G-8.) Does either candidate even bother to consider that if Georgia had been a member of NATO when it launched its incursion into South Ossetia, the United States would now be at war with Russia? Isn't it finally time to dissolve a cold war military alliance and build a new geopolitical security structure for this century? KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL

Noted.

THE 'I-WORD': The revelations in Pulitzer Prize–winner **Ron Suskind**'s book *The Way of the World*—that President Bush was informed in January 2003 that **Saddam Hussein** had no weapons of mass destruction, that the White House ordered the CIA to produce "evidence" of a nonexistent link between Hussein and Al Qaeda—merely confirm what was assumed for years: the President and Vice President were willing to go to any length to get their war on. But we ought not allow our cynicism about the Administration to obscure the fact that this book outlines "worse than Watergate" charges that demand Congressional action. The **House Judiciary Committee** is scheduled to "review" the allegations; the review can no longer dance around the "I-word." If former CIA officials allege in taped interviews that a President or Vice President engaged in falsifying the "case" for war, a failure to impeach does not merely let the wrongdoers off the hook; it effectively places the executive beyond the reach of Congressional oversight or constitutional constraint. That, rather than any particular anger at Bush and Cheney, is why impeachment should be on the table. JOHN NICHOLS

CONYERS'S COUP: When Democrats convened in Denver 100 years ago, African-Americans urged nominee **William Jennings Bryan** to support a platform opposing lynching. Bryan declined, and the *Colorado Statesman* opined that it was "useless" to expect the party "to profess a sincere and wholesome regard for the welfare of the Negro citizen." Another forty years would pass before Democrats finally endorsed a platform that moved the party "into the bright sunshine of human rights." Even so, **Fannie Lou Hamer**'s Mississippi Freedom Democrats struggled for seats at the 1964 convention. The Voting Rights Act and civil rights activism brought 337 African-American delegates and alternates to the 1968 convention with a young leader determined to make their voices heard. Congressman **John Conyers** co-chaired the party's first "black caucus" and took the podium on behalf of **Channing Phillips**, the first African-American placed in nomination for the presidency. "We're trying to act in a constructive sense to build a party to last, a party that will be relevant to a nation made up of many minorities," he said. Conyers kept fighting: for serious treatment of **Shirley Chisholm**'s 1972 run and for the Rev. **Jesse Jackson**'s 1984 and 1988 campaigns, which he saw as revitalizing a party that had "become stale and lifeless." He is similarly energized by **Barack Obama**'s candidacy. "The excitement Obama has generated is tapping into a strong desire for change in America. And that change is happening in the Democratic Party," argues Conyers, who comes to Denver not just to select the first African-American nominee but to continue forging a party relevant to a nation made up of many minorities. JOHN NICHOLS

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Obama and the Sisters

COMMENT

When he accepts the Democratic nomination August 28, Barack Obama will give the most important speech of his life. The bar is set especially high after a primary season of soaring rhetorical achievements. Obama must capture the historical relevance of his nomination while keeping his focus firmly on the country as a whole. He must define the nation's problems while conveying a spirit of optimism. He must promise to bring change while offering reassuring familiarity.

As those in the Obama camp try to meet this oratorical challenge, I am sure they are culling the history of American political rhetoric, especially since his bid for the presidency inspires comparison. Proponents have likened him to the inspirational Bobby Kennedy, who was brash enough to take on his party's elders. Some detractors have compared him to Bill Clinton, arguing that Obama is a moderate in charismatic clothing, hawking hope but wedded to the status quo. His hometown of Chicago compares him to the city's machine-busting first black mayor, Harold Washington, and to another famous Chicagoan, the Rev. Jesse Jackson. On August 28, most will be listening for a resonance of Martin Luther King Jr. because Obama will be speaking exactly forty-five years after Dr. King declared, "I have a dream."

These are fair comparisons, but they ignore another important tradition from which the Obama candidacy emerges—that of Fannie Lou Hamer, Ella Baker, Barbara Jordan, Shirley Chisholm and the many thousands of black women activists whose names history failed to record. These women are the lost prophets of American democracy. As a country we dimly recall their accomplishments and have almost wholly forgotten their words. The epic battle between Obama and Hillary Clinton heightened conversations about race and gender, but it did little to illuminate the intersection between these identities where black women leaders have made significant contributions.

When Barack Obama takes the stage in Denver, he could draw on the political rhetoric of African-American women as the core of his historic speech. The Obama candidacy is built on the organizational foundation laid by these women at least as much as it is on the oratorical showmanship of black male preachers. Obama's speeches may be reminiscent of Dr. King, but his organizing fellows program, use of existing social networks and concern with sustained mobilization recall Ella Baker, the inspirational activist whose work set the course for every major civil rights organization of her time. It was Baker who kept refocusing the movement on organizing rather than oratory, and her work showed that when citizens are given the skills to organize on their own behalf, rather than relying on charismatic leaders to show them the way, real change happens.

Collectively we know very little about the deeds, lives and words of Baker and other black women leaders. Many Americans assume that they spoke about parochial, narrow or self-centered topics. Quite the opposite is true; black women's political work hits the notes of inclusion, universalism and patriotism that Obama needs to emphasize.

On July 22, 1964, Fannie Lou Hamer, born into crushing poverty in rural Mississippi and herself a sharecropper, testified at the Democratic National Convention. She spoke of how she was intimidated, threatened and viciously beaten merely for trying to register to vote. Her language was plain and powerful; speaking of the abuse of another black woman who tried to register, she told the DNC, "They beat her. I don't how long. And after a while she began to pray and asked God to have mercy on those people." Obama can lay claim to Hamer's legacy to remind Americans of the precious value of the vote. Hamer helps Obama tell the country that freedom was bought with the blood of soldiers on foreign battlefields and with the actions of ordinary, courageous, self-sacrificing citizens at home.

In 1972 Shirley Chisholm became the first African-American woman to seek a major-party nomination for the presidency. Like Obama, she faced criticism for being a relative newcomer to national politics, but her outsider status was also the strength of her claim to leadership. While she was proud of her race and gender, she asserted, "I am not the candidate of black America.... I am not the candidate of the women's movement." Running in the first election after the voting age was lowered to 18, she was especially concerned about mobilizing young voters. In the primaries, Obama, like Chisholm, presented himself as "unbought and unbossed." In Denver he will need to draw again on Chisholm's legacy of independence, creativity and youth mobilization.

On July 12, 1976, when Barbara Jordan gave the keynote address at the DNC in New York City, she was the first black woman member of the House from Texas, a state whose Democratic Party perfected the all-white primary. Jordan recognized that her presence meant that "the American Dream need not forever be deferred." She refused simply to list "the problems which cause people to feel cynical, angry, frustrated." Instead, she acknowledged that Americans needed solutions to the problems of the present and ways to fulfill a broader national purpose of freedom and equality. Obama's 2004 DNC speech was profoundly reminiscent of Jordan's keynote. Jordan warned of the great danger America faced if we "cease to be one nation and become instead a collection of interest groups: city against suburb, region against region, individual against individual, each seeking to satisfy private wants." Obama, like Jordan, asked Americans to see their common interests and seek the common good. This year he must ask voters to cross lines of identity, party, religion and region to create a unified America.

Obama's acceptance speech will likely affirm the democratic vision articulated in Jefferson's Declaration of Independence,

Calvin Trillin, Deadline Poet

Management Styles

McCain's operation is seat of the pants,
With rivalries, arguments, grudges and rants.
Obama's campaign is more corporate and smooth,
No fights on the top, and few egos to soothe.
Political junkies say something's unclear:
Just who in the hell's the Republican here?

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reference Franklin Roosevelt's dedication to a society that cares for all its citizens and refer to John Kennedy's call to service and sacrifice. There is no question that Obama will acknowledge Dr. King's inspiring dream. But he also has a chance to acknowledge the black women who helped pave the path on which he now walks and who offered vision and direction for the nation. He should take the words and deeds of these forgotten patriots along with him because when and where they enter, all Americans enter with them. MELISSA HARRIS-LACEWELL

Melissa Harris-Lacewell, an associate professor of politics and African-American studies at Princeton University, is completing her latest book, Sister Citizen: A Text for Colored Girls Who've Considered Politics When Being Strong Isn't Enough.

Guilty of Driving a Truck

COMMENT

On August 6, a mere six and a half years after it brought its first prisoners to Guantánamo Bay, the Bush Administration obtained its first conviction from a military tribunal. White House spokesman Tony Fratto proclaimed that the trial of Salim Hamdan demonstrated that the Military Commissions Act (MCA) provides "a fair and appropriate legal process for prosecuting detainees." John Wesley Hall, president of the National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers, had a more sober assessment, suggesting that the government "must be very proud of itself" for "convict[ing] a truck driver of being guilty of driving a truck."

After all, Hamdan could hardly be described as "the worst of the worst," as Donald Rumsfeld described the original men brought to Guantánamo. Hamdan was not convicted of engaging in or planning terrorist activity of any kind, much less 9/11. He was acquitted on all the conspiracy charges; the government obtained convictions only for "material support" to terrorism, an extremely expansive charge that was created by the MCA in 2006 and applied, ex post facto, to Hamdan for truck driving that predated the law he allegedly violated. And he will serve only five or six months after getting credit for time served.

The Administration had sought desperately to complete a trial before the end of Bush's term. But Hamdan's conviction is unlikely to do anything to repair the damage Guantánamo has done to the US reputation. Only a fair and transparent process could hope to overcome the worldwide skepticism the past six years have created. But the MCA permits introduction of coerced testimony so long as it was obtained through methods short of torture, and the world has seen that this Administration has an extraordinarily expansive view of what constitutes interrogation short of torture. Pursuant to MCA rules, much of the trial took place in secret, closed proceedings—including virtually all aspects that considered Hamdan's claims that his confessions were coerced. His lawyers were forbidden even to mention the CIA, which interrogated him before his transfer to Guantánamo.

Ideally, war crimes trials are designed to vindicate the moral high ground by holding accountable those who have transgressed the most basic rules governing military combat. Think of the tribunals at The Hague or Nuremberg. The Guantánamo trials are at the other end of the spectrum—their rules are fatally skewed by the prosecution's unwillingness to let its own war crimes see the light of day. Until we are willing to be accountable for the crimes we have committed, there can be no justice at Guantánamo. DAVID COLE

David Cole, The Nation*'s legal affairs correspondent, is the author of* Justice at War: The Men and Ideas That Shaped America's War on Terror, *published in June by New York Review Books.*

Comix Nation

by WARD SUTTON

THE BUSH AGENDA (FOR 2009)
WAR WITH IRAN (IN HIS BATHTUB)
SMASH! POW! TAKE THAT, EVIL-DOERS!
SPLASH!
NEGLECTING THE ENVIRONMENT (ON HIS RANCH)
THE SCIENCE IS INCONCLUSIVE ON WHETHER THE LAWN NEEDS MOWING.
PATHETIC RESPONSE TO NATURAL DISASTERS (AT HOME)
BARNEY PEED ON THE RUG!
WELL, I TOLD HIM TO CLEAN IT UP.
HECKUVA JOB, BARN.
MAINTAINING A POLICY OF SECRECY AND MISINFORMATION (OLD HABITS DIE HARD)
I DIDN'T EAT THE LAST PRINGLES. THAT'S THE FILTER TALKIN'!
FIVE MONTHS TO THREE MAGICAL WORDS: FORMER. PRESIDENT. BUSH.

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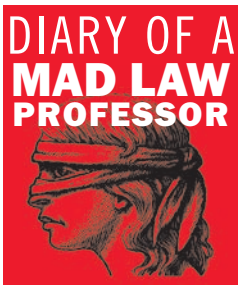
Patricia J. Williams

Tested, Tried, Untrue

Senator Joseph Lieberman almost became the Vice President of the United States in what would have been a Democratic administration.

Now an independent, he speaks on behalf of John McCain, who has voted in lockstep with the Bush Administration 95 percent of the time. "The choice could not be more clear: between one candidate, John McCain, who [has] been tested in war and tried in peace, another candidate who has not. Between one candidate, John McCain, who has always put the country first, worked across party lines to get things done, and one candidate who has not. Between one candidate who's a talker, and the other candidate who's the leader America needs as our next President."

At least Lieberman had the decency to leave the Democratic Party. But his three-point refrain is one that an alarming number of Democrats (including one in five disaffected supporters of Hillary Clinton) seem to be echoing. First, he maintains that Obama is untested in war. It's an oddly ironic reason for independents to vote for a Bush-backed Republican; surely, heroic military service alone isn't a qualification, or those swing voters would have had more respect for the same in the showdown between Kerry, the veteran, and Bush, the draft dodger.



Second, it is demonstrably false that Obama has not worked across party lines; this much is a boldfaced lie. But the rhetorical force of Lieberman's accusation lies not in what Stephen Colbert would call its "truthiness" but in its innuendo: that Obama doesn't play well with others, that he doesn't place America's interests "first." What exactly does he place first, one wonders? This space is filled with the gas of right-wing shock jocks and Fox News: he places himself first, of course! He's full of himself! Arrogant! Condescending! Elitist! If he can't bowl with the common man, how on earth can he be Commander in Chief? He may puff himself up as a citizen of the world, but the man can't digest homegrown grits 'n' gravy!

Third, we have the peculiar attempt to defame Obama as "a talker." If politicians were once valued for their ability to speak lucidly and compellingly, today significant parts of the electorate apparently delight in a President who can't string words into a coherent thought. But being "a talker" is also code for having no substance. Its meaning is elucidated, again, by AM radio, Fox and certain parts of the blogosphere—sites whose audiences are largely white and male and number in the millions. In this world, being "a talker" is not, heaven forbid, to be confused with what brave and fearless demagogues like Sean Hannity do. Obama's "talk" is the equivalent of being a hypnotist, a mesmerizer, a magician, a siren, a soulless malefactor who snares you in the singsong of his pretty words and mellifluous voice, then sucks out your brains while you sleep. (Talk about transference!) Recently, when denigrating Obama as a cocky-ass, crowd-pleasing "rock star" didn't work, this line morphed into more chilling descriptions of his appeal as "fascist" and "Hitlerian."

Obama's campaign has been bookended by astonishingly contradictory stereotypes. In the beginning, Senator Joe Biden framed him as surprisingly clean, articulate and unsaddled with racial baggage. As we come to the finish line, Obama is being assaulted by an inventive hybridity of prejudices: he's underqualified yet overeducated; he's holier-than-thou but wallows in the mud of slinging the race card; he's effete and effeminate but simultaneously an angry black hate-ah who swears secret allegiance to a separatist Afrocentric Nation; he's a liberation-theology Christian who prays to a Muslim God; he "dictates" from on high while having no clear positions, "allowing others to define him."

Then, of course, there's class resentment. We love the narrative of Horatio Alger, but we only have to read Henry James to remember how terribly ambivalent Americans have always been about outsiders who make it against big odds—those "big odds" often marking our deepest resistances and prejudices. We chide young inner-city kids who taunt their aspiring peers for talking "white," but that's exactly what white commentators do when they trash candidates for talking "elite." This much is not new: lower- and upper-class blacks have always been marked and derided in differing ways. If, in the public debate, few call Obama the "N-word" (lower-class marker), a lot of commentators have come pretty close to calling him an uppity pretender (upper-class marker).

Yet in a historical sense, the incoherent range of resentments directed against Obama mirrors so-called "white privilege": the refreshing self-assurance that comes from always having people of color to feel lucky beside—a not-entirely-conscious investment in feeling as though you're a good overseer, a kind benefactor, a source of uplift, a model to be emulated, a sharer, a provider, a dispenser of tough love. A feeling of impoverishment sets in when a member of that lower class you're supposed to be uplifting says, "I am one of you. I am your peer, and I'm equipped to represent you in taking the helm."

This is not racism in an overt, self-aware sense; it's racism in the thoughtless, cognitively dissonant way that allows good people who identify as open-minded Democrats to embrace an overtly counterfactual mess of impossibly contradictory slanders and slurs. The only true consistency in the lies that trail Obama is the degree to which they allow a diversity of options with which to express that resentment.

As McCain's politics are virtually identical to those of Bush, so Obama's stated platform is virtually identical to Hillary Clinton's on every matter from women's issues to defense. Eight years of horrendous policies have left us a corrupted justice system, undue executive secrecy and governmental unaccountability, scandals too numerous to count, "endless" war, colossal levels of administrative mismanagement and a ruined economy. If one was going to vote for Clinton but will not now for Obama, what else could it be but the most insidious, self-defeating form of identity politics? If one were at all invested in practical outcomes, however could one fail to heed these larger stakes? ■

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Eric Alterman

Obama and the Politics of 'Presumptuousness'

Given the extent to which the self-definition of elite Washington reporters depends not only on their access to power but also on their role in reinforcing its prerogatives, it would be odd if eight years of a limitlessly corrupt, pathologically dishonest and lawless presidency did not leave its mark. And while we might have hoped that these actions would help the press to stiffen its collective backbone, unfortunately it has done just the opposite.

Republicans are running a presidential campaign at a moment of historic unpopularity for their party and with a candidate who has a panoply of potentially negative associations for voters. In the first place, John McCain's stances on the issues, while consistent with the desires of his party's base, are at odds with the professed wishes of the American people. Second, while he bills himself as a man of principle, he has in fact changed his position—"flip-flopped"—repeatedly on fundamental issues such as immigration, taxes, campaign finance, reproductive choice, etc. (See "Loving McCain," July 7.)

Third, owing to the inheritances of the woman with whom he conducted an adulterous affair before leaving his disabled first wife, the Republican enjoys eight separate residences across the country as well as the corporate jets she puts at his disposal, and he ambles around in shoes costing more than $500 a pair. At 71, he would be the oldest first-term President in US history if elected; and on the campaign trail he frequently becomes confused, loses his temper and sings songs about bombing Iran. He has engaged in discussion with supporters about that "bitch" Hillary Clinton. On one occasion in 1998, he joked that Attorney General Janet Reno was the "father" of the "ugly" teenager Chelsea Clinton.

His opponent has no such liabilities. His party is on an upswing. His positions are popular. He has never been associated with personal scandal; has earned, together with his wife, all of his family's money himself; is young, vivacious and without McCain's mean streak. But Barack Obama is black, and burdened with a Muslim-sounding name, in a country that has yet to transcend the racial horrors of its past or the reflexive parochialism and xenophobia of much of its populace. McCain must depend on these two factors to remain competitive in an election year when all indications suggest that a conservative Republican would have little to no chance of victory.

Of course, a presidential campaign cannot openly traffic in racism and xenophobia. So it must conduct this campaign in a kind of code. Historically blacks and dark-skinned immigrants have been accused of "not knowing their place" by whites who see their positions challenged, and are deemed to be "uppity." The code word du jour is "presumptuous."

Think about it: the candidate who won his party's presidential nomination and is leading in every national poll stands accused of acting as if becoming President requires some planning and preparation. Apparently ignorance and incompetence have become prized virtues in George W. Bush's Washington, and so potential competence is considered a cause for concern.

Sadly, many in our mainstream media have eagerly enlisted in the racist Republican cause. I could give numerous examples, but let us focus on just one: the *Washington Post*'s White House columnist, Dana Milbank. In a recent column, Milbank, who prides himself on his alleged lack of ideology, complained that "Barack Obama has long been his party's presumptive nominee. Now he's becoming its presumptuous nominee," adding, "Obama's biggest challenger may not be Republican John McCain but rather his own hubris." Milbank's shocking litany of Obama's offenses included his taking a foreign trip, meeting with world leaders and leading Washington figures, failing to post his schedule, leaving a private prayer in Jerusalem's Western Wall and tying up traffic in Washington. Each of these unremarkable events was described in language dripping with sarcasm and imputed evil intent—as if Obama was responsible for his security detail's traffic planning. In a single column, Milbank complained of Obama's "presidential-style world tour…presidential-style business…presidential-style pep rally…presidential-style visit…acting presidential…outdoing the President in ruffles and flourishes lately…"

After holding Obama personally responsible for the campaign's failure to include a *New Yorker* reporter on its press plane abroad—allegedly in retaliation for the satirical cartoon—Milbank wrote, "Even Bush hasn't tried that." Oh, really? Does a White House reporter really need to be reminded that the *New York Times* was refused access to Dick Cheney's press plane in 2004? Has no one mentioned to him that US citizens have been removed from official presidential events because of the bumper stickers on their cars?

Most egregious, Milbank also apparently sliced and diced Obama's words to give them exactly the opposite connotation the candidate intended. In order to drive home his accusation, Milbank wrote, "Inside, according to a witness, he told the House members, 'This is the moment…that the world is waiting for,' adding: 'I have become a symbol of the possibility of America returning to our best traditions.'" Milbank's colleague Jonathan Weisman later explained that according to participants in the meeting, Obama added, "It has become increasingly clear in my travel, the campaign—that the crowds, the enthusiasm, 200,000 people in Berlin, is not about me at all. It's about America. I have just become a symbol." When questioned about his journalistic ethics, Milbank called the criticisms "whines" but was unable to offer any evidence or even claim a good-faith effort to verify his account.

In fact, it is the *Post*'s White House columnist who is the symbol: a symbol of a press corps that has become almost as corrupted—morally and intellectually—by Bush and company as has the US government. In media as well as politics, Americans need a change they can believe in. ■

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PROGRESSIVES IN THE OBAMA MOMENT

by ROBERT L. BOROSAGE AND KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL

Electric. When Barack Obama receives the Democratic presidential nomination before 75,000 people in Denver's Mile High Stadium on the forty-fifth anniversary of Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech, new possibilities will be born. A historic candidacy, a new generation in motion, a nation yearning for change. Even the cynics running the McCain campaign might be touched, if they weren't so busy savaging Obama as a vain celebrity not up to the task of leading a nation.

No one should be blinded by the lights. It will take hard work to turn the nomination into victory in a campaign that has already turned ugly. Moreover, even if victorious, Obama will inherit the calamitous conditions wrought by conservative failures—a sinking economy, unsustainable occupations in Iraq and Afghanistan, accelerating climate change, Gilded Age inequality, a broken healthcare system and much more.

Obama will also be limited by the constricted consensus of an establishment not yet able to contemplate the changes needed to set this country right again. To be successful, his presidency will have to be bolder and more radical than now imagined.

A historic candidate, the forbidding conditions and the constricted consensus make it vital that progressives think clearly and act independently in forging a strategy over the next months. The following is a contribution to a rich and ongoing discussion. We invite others to join it at thenation.com in the weeks to come.

A Sea-Change Election

The Obama nomination sets the stage for a sea-change election, one that could not only elect a Democratic President and increased reform majorities in both houses of Congress but also mark a clear turn from the conservative ideas that have dominated our politics for three decades.

In recent weeks, the media—primed by a Republican strategy contrasting Obama's purported doublespeak with McCain's alleged Straight Talk—have focused on Obama's compromises

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and backsliding. Much of the alleged retrenchment has been exaggerated. Some of it—like his fold on the FISA wiretap bill, mixed signals on trade, the compromise on offshore drilling—has been clear and deplorable. Many on the left were dismayed as the Obama campaign trotted out advisers from a Democratic bench that had championed the toxic Rubinomics brew of corporate trade and financial deregulation.

These concerns should not distract us from the central reality: this election features a stark ideological contrast. Although marketed as a trustworthy maverick, McCain accurately describes himself as a "foot soldier in the Reagan revolution" and attests that "on the transcendent issues, the most important issues of our day, I've been totally in agreement and support of President Bush." He is committed to the full Bush catastrophe: continued war in Iraq, more tax cuts for the wealthiest, more corporate trade deals, more deregulation, more hostility toward labor, more conservative social policies and reactionary judges. Indeed, he's Bush on steroids. McCain seeks not only to privatize Social Security but also to unravel employer-based healthcare, leaving people to negotiate alone with insurance companies liberated from regulation. His bellicose posturing on Iran and Iraq is as disastrous as his pledge of impossibly deep cuts in domestic programs. He embraces the corporate economic and trade agenda that has so devastated the American middle class. If he is defeated, it will mark the end of the Reagan era.

Obama will face formidable obstacles, including a business lobby girded for battle, which will do everything it can to stall reform.

Obama clearly offers a change of course. His victory in itself will require overcoming the racial fears that have so long divided this country. He carries a reform agenda—largely driven by progressives—into the election: an end to the occupation of Iraq, using the money squandered there to rebuild America; affordable healthcare for all, paid for by raising taxes on the wealthy; a concerted drive for energy independence, generating jobs while investing in renewable energy and conservation. He is committed to empowering labor, to holding corporations and banks more accountable and to challenging our trade policies. A social liberal, his judicial appointees will keep the right from consolidating its hold on the federal judiciary. Obama may not be a "movement" progressive in the way that Reagan was a "movement" conservative, and he may have disappointed activists with his recent compromises, but make no mistake: his election will open a new era of reform, the scope of which will depend—as Obama often says—on independent progressive mobilization to keep the pressure on and overcome entrenched interests.

As this is written, an election Obama should win handily is locked in a virtual tie. Both the Obama and McCain campaigns treat the race as a referendum on Obama, with the former focused on getting Americans comfortable with trusting a young African-American with an unusual name, and the Rove minions in the McCain campaign intent on stoking the fears that enabled them to assemble a white majority party in the past.

Obama's campaign will not succeed without the independent efforts of progressive activists. One central task is winning support among wary white blue-collar workers, the core target of the Rovian poison. This will require persuasion as well as mobilization; the work of the AFL-CIO, Change to Win, Working America, religious groups and others with a base in these communities in swing states will be of critical importance.

Progressives generally—and independent media and the blogosphere specifically—can contribute by reminding voters there's a clear choice in this election, with McCain representing the same old, same old. While exposing McCain's doubletalk, his Bush-redux agenda and the money and interests behind the scurrilous right-wing independent expenditure campaigns, progressives can also help build support for reform. The new Health Care for America Now coalition, for example, has the resources to expose McCain's healthcare folly, thereby building a mandate for universal coverage. The antiwar movement should be challenging McCain's saber-rattling on Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan, helping to strengthen US support for a change in course. With gas prices at the center of American concerns, the environmental alliance around jobs and energy can consolidate support for a concerted drive toward energy independence, while challenging absurd claims that we can drill our way out of the crisis.

Driving Reform

While focusing on what is certain to be a difficult campaign, progressives should start thinking now about strategy for an Obama presidency. Clearly his election and inauguration would mark an exciting moment. At home, a new sense of energy and idealism will be unleashed. Across the world, his election will begin the process of restoring America's ravaged reputation. Not only will Obama usher a new generation into politics, but for the first time a President with experience as a community organizer will have the ability to mobilize directly a dedicated following larger than any other in politics [see our roundtable forum of community organizers on page 34].

In the first months of an Obama administration, progressives should be pursuing an inside-outside strategy in relation to the administration. For example, in the transition, we should push to place allies in strategic positions, particularly in the areas of economic policy and national security. The AFL-CIO and other groups are preparing lists of potential candidates. These inside efforts should be complemented by watchdog monitoring and reporting on potential nominees. No free pass should be given to those who drove the financial and trade policies that led to the current economic debacles or supported the invasion of Iraq, the worst foreign policy fiasco in recent history.

For Obama to achieve his core promises, he will have to push significant reforms early. As Dan Lazare has argued, our entire political system is designed to block reform, not facilitate it. Periods of significant change in American politics are rare, but they feature spasms of furious activity: Roosevelt's

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first 100 days, Johnson's push in 1964–65, Reagan's reaction in 1981–82. Inevitably, these spasms don't last long before reaction sets in. So it is vital to move rapidly and boldly and across many areas to have any chance at success.

Obama's first decision—to be made, no doubt, during the transition—will be the most telling. He has pledged that he will instruct the Joint Chiefs of Staff to prepare a sensible plan for ending the Iraq occupation. Already, Democratic security advisers who initially supported the war are calling for "conditional engagement," arguing that the United States can't afford simply to set a timetable to get out. Thus it is vital that the peace movement organize aggressively during the campaign, and mobilize independently and visibly immediately after the election. The Obama White House must have no doubt about the firestorm in Congress, in the streets and within the Democratic Party that would be caused by a retreat from this pledge.

If the Iraq promise is kept, progressives will sensibly work to help define Obama's agenda from the inside and support key parts from the outside. He will lay out a major initiative on jobs and energy. He has said that he'll try to push through healthcare reform quickly—although that is likely to trigger trench warfare in Congress (and progressives will have to overcome deep internal divisions to ensure that fundamental reform succeeds). Obama will reverse many of the reactionary Bush executive orders, from the global gag rule to secrecy excesses stemming from the "war on terror." His first budget decisions most likely will have to deal directly with a broader stimulus plan to get the economy going. He has pledged to support passage of the Employee Free Choice Act, enabling workers to organize unions without employer harassment.

But Obama will encounter formidable obstacles. He'll face a business lobby girded for battle. Corporations have already begun moving more of their money to Democratic incumbents and are snapping up former Democratic legislators and staffers for their lobbies [see "Dollars for Donkeys" on page 28]. They will do everything they can to stall healthcare and drug-pricing reform, empowerment of workers and re-regulation of Wall Street. Moreover, while Democrats are likely to enjoy larger majorities in both houses, their caucuses are likely to be less progressive as they pick up seats in very conservative, formerly Republican districts.

Progressives will enjoy their greatest strength mobilizing independently to support Obama's promises. We can organize constituent pressure on politicians who are blocking the way, something even a President with Obama's activist network would be loath to do. We can expose the lobbies and interests and backstage maneuvers designed to limit reforms. Now that newspapers increasingly lack the resources for investigation, progressive media, online and off, and the independent progressive media infrastructure—from *The Nation* to Media Matters to Brave New Films to The Huffington Post—must assume a greater role in monitoring the opposition, even as we mobilize activists in targeted districts across the country.

In doing this, we can help give backbone to the Obama agenda, even as we supply muscle and energy to help pass it. The best way to achieve this is to generate large-scale independent-issue campaigns. A clear example is the Healthcare for Americans Now Coalition, which is ready to take on the insurance companies and support the White House's commitment to universal care. The new Half in Ten Campaign, spearheaded by ACORN and the Center for American Progress Action Fund, will help ensure that poverty does not disappear from the agenda. Progressives generally should join the AFL-CIO and Change to Win in their drive to pass the Employee Free Choice Act. The Apollo Alliance and a range of environmental efforts will support the initiative on jobs and energy.

The challenge for progressives is whether the energy and idealism unleashed by Obama can expand the limits of the current debate.

Acting in support of Obama will require challenging legislators in both parties who stand in the way, a task progressives should undertake aggressively. The Service Employees International Union has already taken the lead in announcing a $10 million "accountability program," designed to force politicians to heed the will of their voters, with a new plan—Justice for All—as the core vehicle. This should be complemented by other independent efforts, despite likely objections from the Democratic Congressional leadership and possibly the White House. Democrats should be on notice from their own constituents that they will be expected to help move reform, not stand in its way.

The Constricted Consensus

The great challenge for progressives is whether the energy and idealism unleashed by the Obama candidacy—and the collapse of conservatism—can expand the limits of the current debate. McCain promises merely more of the same bankrupt policies, but Obama's reform agenda is itself limited by a very constricted establishment consensus that is an obstacle to real change.

On national security, both candidates have pledged to increase the size of the military, adding billions to a bloated budget that already represents nearly half the world's military spending. Both assume America's role as globocop; neither suggests unraveling the US empire of military bases. Both seem intent on deepening the occupation of Afghanistan. Neither has dared to embrace the conservative RAND Corporation's conclusion that the very notion of a "war on terror" is counterproductive, and that aggressive intelligence and police cooperation should be the centerpiece of our strategy.

Obama has called for a second stimulus plan focused on new energy and rebuilding America, but he hasn't suggested anything like the major public initiatives—the combination of public investment, revised global economic strategy, industrial policy and financial regulation—that would be essential to get the real economy moving again while responding to the threat of catastrophic climate change.

Obama has made affordable healthcare for all a centerpiece of his agenda, but he has not addressed the unraveling

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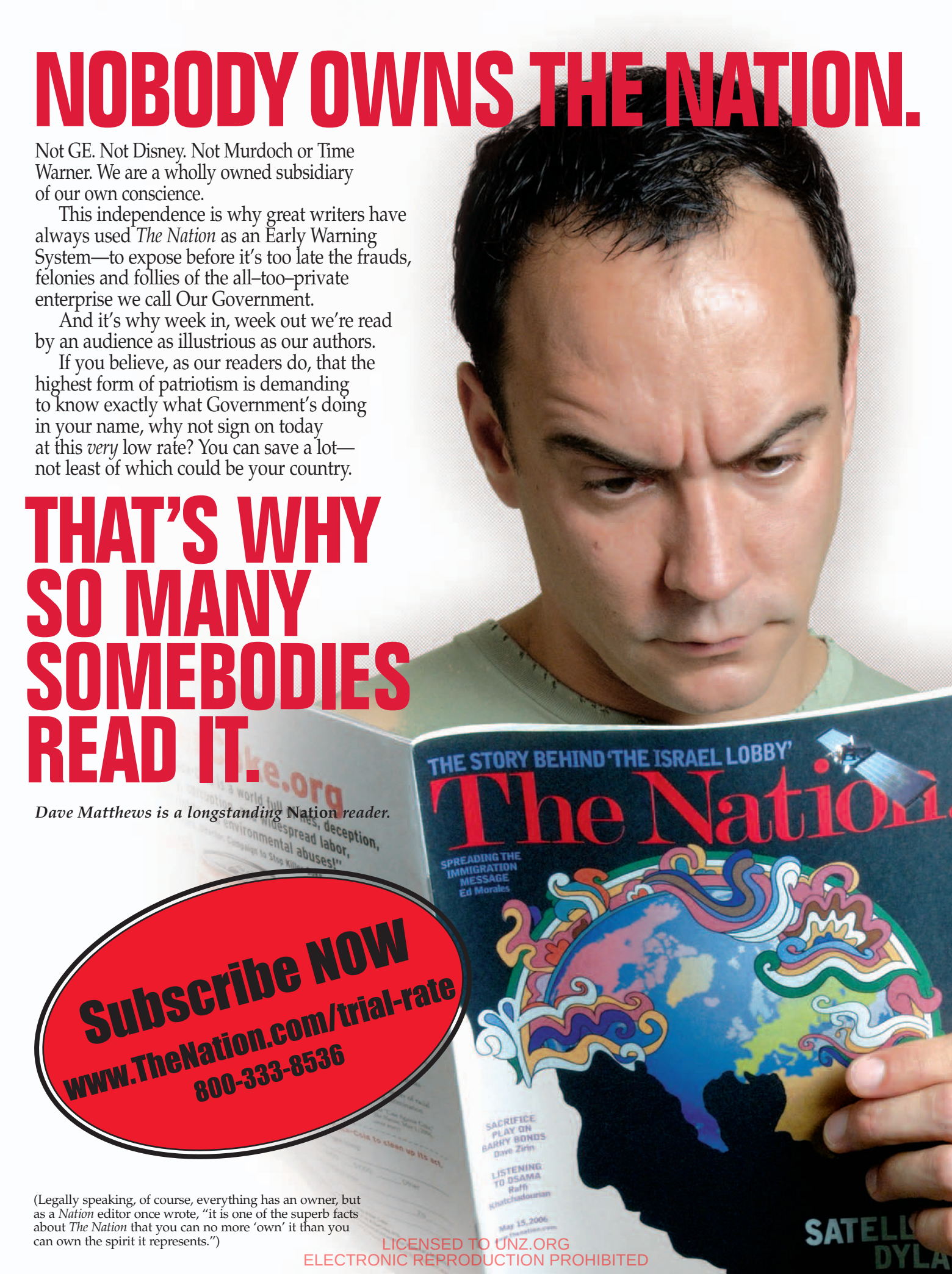

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of the private social contract once delivered through corporations and unions. It will take independent efforts to drive an economic bill of rights, from healthcare to pensions to Social Security to guaranteed paid vacation, in addition to paid sick days and family leave.

Obama laid out promising principles for financial reform in his Cooper Union speech in March, but he hasn't challenged the Wall Street bailout, nor has he mobilized support for policing the shadow banking system that has proved so destructive in its greed.

Obama defends liberal social reforms, but a serious war on poverty—or an initiative to transform our brutal criminal system of injustice that is devastating the lives of young minority men—is not yet on the agenda.

And while Obama is a former professor of constitutional law, he hasn't called for dismantling the imperial presidency. It will take independent efforts to reclaim for the Congress and the people the powers Bush has arrogated to the presidency.

This corrosive consensus reflects the entrenched power of the established order. It is enforced by aggressive lobbies—the military-industrial complex, Wall Street, corporate interests—and rationalized by well-upholstered house scholars. The establishment's strength is its ability to simply exclude alternatives from serious consideration.

After the first flurry of activity, an Obama administration may well realize that the dire condition of the country demands a far bolder agenda than what is now on the table. Progressives should recognize that an Obama administration would have no alternative but to be one of constant experimentation. We should embrace the best of the public-policy proposals that scholars are developing in our universities and think tanks. These ideas challenge limited assumptions about government and call for everything from dismantling our empire of military bases to curbing the imperial presidency, from passing progressive tax reforms to strengthening the public commons. Again, independent campaigning—particularly regarding concerns not high on the national agenda—will help lift issues into the mainstream.

Here it will be vital to sustain a reform infrastructure independent of the administration or the Democratic leadership in Congress. Progressives in the Senate and House, many grouped around the Progressive Caucus, can provide both leadership and a public forum for new ideas. Independent research institutes—like the Institute for America's Future, the Institute for Policy Studies, the Economic Policy Institute and others—can help think outside the establishment box. Progressive bloggers can track the limits of the debate and give new ideas greater visibility. Reform leaders at the state and local levels, coordinated by centers like the Progressive States Network, can champion legislation—like paid sick days, mandated vacation minimums, early childhood education, tighter regulation of insurance companies, creative financing for energy conservation projects—that will be a model for the national agenda. Grassroots organizing—neighbor to neighbor, supported by the energy of the young, linked to national concerns—will be essential if Obama's election is to generate thoroughgoing reform.

When John F. Kennedy was elected President, he too summoned a new generation into politics. While Kennedy's agenda

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Moderator, John Nichols
—Rep. Jim McGovern, Rep. Hilda Solis and Bob Moser on immigration reform and economic justice

Thursday, August 28, 11:00 to 12:30
Moderator, John Nichols
—Rep. Keith Ellison, Rep. Robert Wexler and Victor Navasky on restoring and maintaining our constitutional rights

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was limited, the energy he unleashed helped build the civilizing movements of the following decades—the antiwar, civil rights, women's, environmental and gay rights movements.

America now is very different from the America of the 1960s. Those movements, nurtured in the cradle of postwar prosperity, assumed the country could afford to be more just. This generation has grown up with much greater economic insecurity, is laden with debt and is struggling to find decent jobs. It faces an economy that cannot be sustained—and must be transformed.

But once more a young and exciting candidate, seeking the presidency after a long and failed conservative era, can spark the hope and sense of possibility that carry far beyond his campaign platform. Progressives should be focusing less on the limits of the Obama agenda and more on the possibilities that a successful candidacy opens up.

As a former community organizer, Obama has taught that "real change comes from the bottom up." It comes about by "imagining and then fighting for and then working for—struggling for—what did not seem possible before." As President, he will face conflicting pressures, and undoubtedly he will carefully pick his fights. The movement that he has called into being will have little choice but to embrace his charge and mobilize across the country to achieve what "did not seem possible before." ■

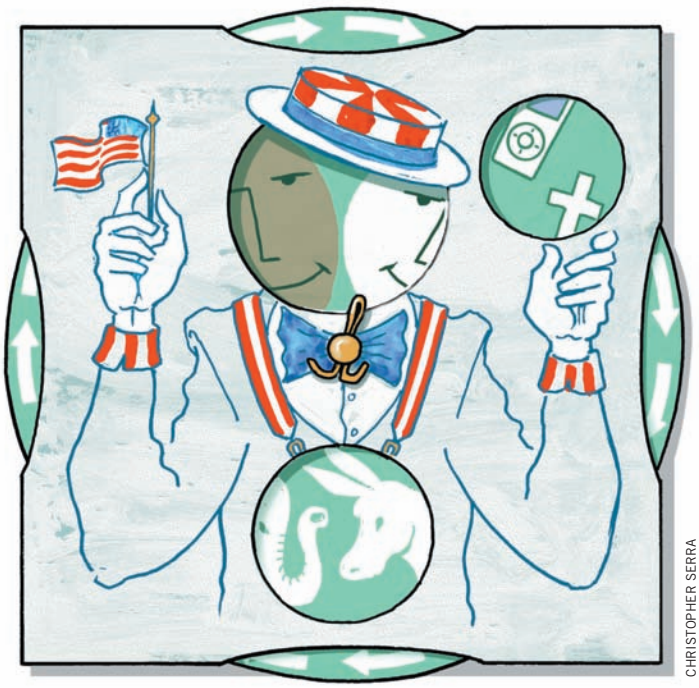
The End of Bubba Dominance

Whether or not Obama wins, demographic trends spell the end of backlash politics.

by CHRIS BOWERS

Should Barack Obama win in November, as he appears poised to do, his victory will be viewed by future generations of political scientists as a fulcrum when the balance of power in American coalition politics shifted. The election of the first African-American President in the history of the United States would finally put an end to conservative-dominated "backlash" identity politics, replacing it with a new, pluralistic mainstream. Even if John McCain somehow does snatch victory from the jaws of defeat, the underlying structural dynamics of the electorate all point toward the same conclusion: the end of Bubba dominance is at hand, and a new era is imminent.

Technically speaking, even a large Obama victory would not be a realignment. Realignments are moments when there are broad shifts in the electorate, and in 2008 there will be no significant shifts in the partisan voter preference of any demographic group. Important swing groups such as white Catholics, suburban women, Latinos, seculars, Independents and working-class whites are not likely to demonstrate any large, sudden or long-term shifts in allegiance from one party to the other. Instead, an Obama victory would simultaneously be comeuppance to a forty-year-old conservative strategy of scapegoating minorities and the realization of long-term demographic trends that finally allow those minorities collectively to achieve majority status. Relative to his national levels of support, Obama will receive pretty much the same percentage of support from virtually all demographic groups that previous, defeated Democratic nominees such as Michael Dukakis and John Kerry received. The difference will be that, in 2008, those groups will be large enough to win a national election.



CHRISTOPHER SERRA

Since 1968 American presidential elections have been defined as a competition over fundamentally conservative identity groups. Even though they are not precisely congruous, a direct lineage exists from the Nixon-forged Southern Strategy of the 1960s and '70s, to the Reagan Democrats of the '80s, to Mark Penn's Bubbas of the '90s and on to the Values Voters of this decade. These swing voting groups are overwhelmingly white, not very urban, heavily blue-collar, generally Southern and always socially conservative. Even though the labels have changed, these four criteria have been the genetic code of swing voters for nearly forty years. In every case, the decisive swing voting group has been hostile to impending social change brought on by various civil rights movements and resentful of the cultural predilections of an urban, bicoastal "liberal elite." The quest to capture these voters has created an entire generation of pundits, strategists and party leaders who will do everything possible to appear not-liberal, not-elite and in touch with the values of small-

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town America, whatever those values happen to be at any given moment. A Southern accent helps, too. A Democratic politician's willingness to distance himself or herself (but usually himself) from—and to use "Sister Souljah" moments frequently to denounce—the left wing of the Democratic Party helps even more.

Consider, for example, the last two Democratic Presidents: Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton. They were successful where other Democratic nominees of the past forty years were not, almost entirely because of their superior appeal to this archetypal swing voter. In 1992, looking only at Democratic and Republican voters, Clinton actually received a smaller percentage of the African-American vote than Dukakis had four years earlier (83 percent to 89 percent) and performed identical to Dukakis among Latinos (both at 70 percent of the two-party vote). However, Clinton still won the two lowest income brackets by twice the margin Dukakis had (24 percent to 11 percent). His superior performance was almost certainly due to a far higher share of working-class white voters than Dukakis. In 1976 Carter received a percentage of the liberal vote similar to Walter Mondale's in 1984 (74 percent to 71 percent) but made up the difference by scoring the highest Democratic percentage of the self-identified conservative vote (30 percent) since the advent of exit polls. This was largely because Carter won ten of the eleven states that once formed the Confederacy, even as he lost what are now the blue states of California and Illinois.

Carter and Clinton did not win by increasing Democratic appeal to, or increasing the electorate's percentage of, self-identified liberals, racial and ethnic minorities, or what social and economic theorist Richard Florida has termed the Creative Class. Both are Southerners and remain the only two Democratic nominees since 1968 to win a Southern state (Florida 2000 notwithstanding, of course). While Carter lost white voters by four percentage points in 1976, and while Bill Clinton lost white voters by two points in both 1992 and 1996, every other Democratic nominee since 1972 has lost the white vote by at least thirteen points. Their path to victory required increasing the Democratic percentage among Southerners, Reagan Democrats, Bubbas and Values Voters. They had to win over a substantial percentage of that sort of swing voter because, in sheer demographic terms, that sort of swing voter was a dominant percentage of the electorate during the final decades of the twentieth century.

Obama, on the other hand, will probably lose working-class whites by about the same percentage as Dukakis, and may win the election anyway.

Despite Clinton's and Carter's relative successes, conservative Republicans have almost always proved more successful at appealing to this type of swing voter than Democrats of any stripe. However, when combined with broad national demographic trends, the successful strategies conservative Republicans used to appeal to this swing voter contained the seeds of their eventual defeat. In order to solidify their support among the white, blue-collar, nonliberal, nonurban swing voters described above, conservative Republicans from Richard Nixon to George W. Bush employed a series of identity-based "backlash" narratives against a diverse array of minority demographic groups who were scapegoated for the problems the swing voters faced: liberals destroyed traditional culture and humbled America before its enemies. African-Americans used affirmative action to take jobs they didn't deserve and created a national plague of crime. Immigrants illegally took American jobs and public services without even bothering to learn our language. Homosexuals destroyed families and threatened to convert your children to their lifestyle. Non-Christians forced Jesus out of public places and declared war on Christmas. All of these rhetorical strategies pitted a majority of voters (the religious, the white, the middle class, the straight) against some minority. Given the math, it's perhaps not surprising that the strategy worked: Democrats have failed to receive more than 50.1 percent of the national vote in all of the past ten presidential elections.

Republicans are facing a slow-motion electoral tidal wave that is turning the country nearly 1 percent more Democratic every year.

But even as the scapegoating solidified conservative Republican support among the archetypal swing voter of the past forty years, it also had the rather predictable side effect of pushing all of the demonized groups into overwhelming, more than two-to-one support for Democrats. The end result is that even though Howard Dean was pilloried for saying this three years ago, the two major political coalitions in the United States can be quickly summarized as a relatively homogeneous white Christian Republican coalition and an extremely diverse, pluralistic nonwhite and/or non-Christian Democratic coalition.

Looking at the most recent national elections, the 2006 midterms, these gaps are unmistakable. According to weighted averages derived from the national House exit poll, Republicans won white voters 51 percent to 47 percent, while Democrats won the 23 percent of the electorate that self-identified as nonwhite 75 percent to 24 percent. Further, looking only at the white vote, while Republicans won self-identified white Christians by a sizable 57–41 gap, Democrats won the 14 percent of the electorate that self-identified as both white and non-Christian (Jewish, "Other" or "None") by a 73–24 margin, virtually identical to the Democratic margin among nonwhites. Despite losing the white Christian vote, which still forms almost two-thirds of the electorate, by a hefty sixteen-point margin, the Democrats ran up enormous numbers among the scapegoated groups, which carried them to a very healthy, overall 8.2 point victory. In an election when Republicans used immigrants as their main scapegoated group, the Latino vote was particularly key in this victory, as 2.4 percent of the overall 10.7 percent pro-Democratic swing came from Latinos. By contrast, less than 0.7 percent of the Democratic gain came from self-identified Republicans, even though Republicans made up 36 percent of the 2006 electorate and Latinos com-

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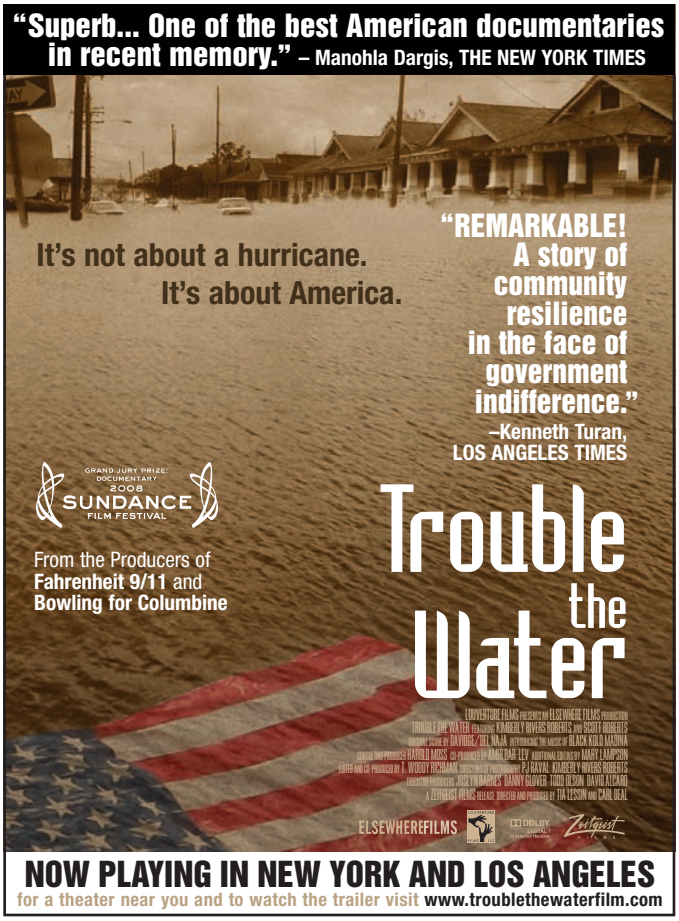
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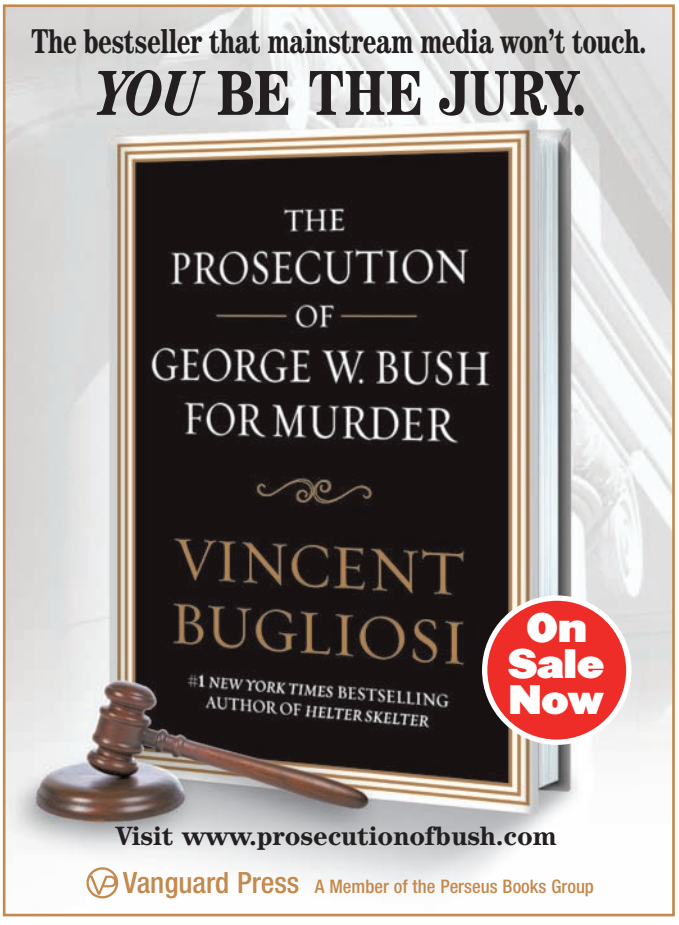
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posed only 8 percent. It was the largest victory for either party in a national election since Reagan's 1984 landslide over Mondale, and it was delivered more by scapegoated Latinos than by any other swing group.

Given that Republicans consolidated a shrinking majority against a series of rising minorities, unless the scapegoating stops, their electoral future appears bleak. In 1992 Latinos and Asians made up only 3 percent of the electorate, but in 2006 they accounted for 10 percent. In 1990, according to the National Survey of Religious Identification conducted by the City University of New York, only 10 percent of the country self-identified as non-Christian. According to a 2001 follow-up from CUNY as well as a 2008 study conducted by the Pew Forum on religion and American life, that number had increased to 22–23 percent of the national population. Although it receives somewhat less fanfare, the national drift away from Christian self-identification is changing the cultural face of America even more rapidly than the large influx of Latino and Asian immigrants. Combined, these two trends are changing the cultural and political structure of America with such alacrity that, according to a 2005 study by Greenberg Quinlin Rosner, "OMG! How Generation Y Is Redefining Faith in the iPod Era," only 39 percent of Americans born between 1965 and 1994 (inclusive) self-identify as both white and Christian, compared with 66 percent of Americans born in 1964 or earlier. Given the partisan voting habits of nonwhites and non-Christians discussed in the previous paragraph, it isn't hard to see that Republicans are facing a slow-motion electoral tidal wave that is turning the country nearly 1 percent more Democratic every year, regardless of specific political conditions.

It is from this rising tide that Obama should find his victory. For all the talk of his appeal to the youth vote, the truth is that overwhelming Democratic advantages among young voters are a derivative of pro-Democratic demographics, such as nonwhites and non-Christians (and single women and the LGBT population) forming a disproportionate share of the youth vote. For all of Obama's bipartisan and postpartisan rhetoric, he will actually gain far more votes from the millions of newly self-identified Democrats that this rising political tide creates. Extensive polling from Rasmussen Reports in June indicates that the 2008 electorate will self-identify at 40–41 percent Democratic, up from 37 percent in 2004. Given that this pro-Democratic shift began in February, the cause of it appears primarily due to the epic nomination campaign between Obama and Hillary Clinton, which registered more than 3 million new Democrats nationwide and may have created an even greater number of self-identifying Democrats. The result of this shift is that even if Obama wins 60 percent of the Independent vote, he will actually improve on John Kerry's vote total more from self-identified Democrats than from self-identified Independents. Also, for all the talk of potentially increasing African-American turnout, inevitably Latino, Asian and white non-Christian turnout will increase more because they are rapidly increasing their share of the electorate. As such, Obama will improve on Kerry's 2004 vote totals much more from the latter groups than from African-Americans.

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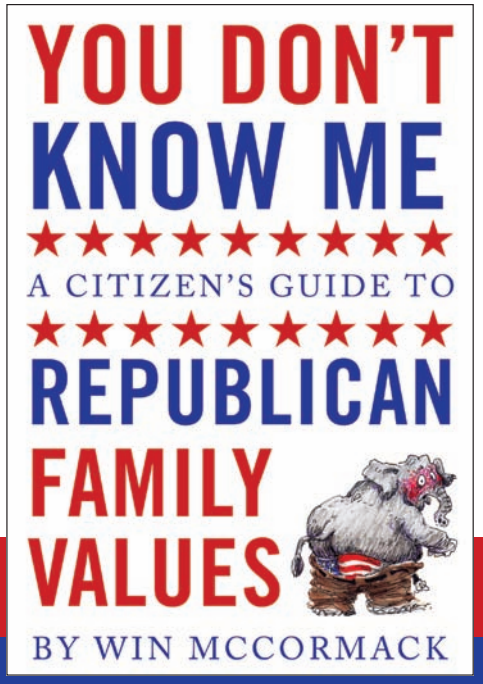
As the first nonwhite presidential nominee in recent American history, Obama serves as a powerful symbol to head this rising coalition at the moment when it becomes a national majority. From 2008 forward, it will be possible for even those Democrats who have been labeled "liberal elites" to win national elections. This goes for Obama, too, given that the "elitist" label has haunted him for months and, according to a June poll from the *Los Angeles Times* and Bloomberg News, only 23 percent of the electorate considers him either a moderate or a conservative. In other words, an African-American Democrat of nontraditional faith who is perceived as a liberal elitist seems to be the favorite to win a national election despite losing white Southerners, Reagan Democrats, Bubbas and Values Voters.

Republicans will find they cannot sustain a working majority without better margins among the marginalized. Party leaders from Karl Rove to Grover Norquist have already predicted long-term problems for the GOP if its base continues to demand the most punitive immigration policy possible, driving Hispanic voters into the Democratic Party in greater and greater numbers. The more America looks like California, the more national Republicans will mold themselves after Arnold Schwarzenegger rather than, say, Newt Gingrich. Hungry for a victory, Republican primary voters might even follow. Already, in contested primaries in 2008, John McCain won the GOP nomination by scoring overwhelming margins among Republicans who said they were either "dissatisfied" or "angry" with the Bush Administration, even though Mitt Romney won a plurality of voters who indicated they were "enthusiastic" or "satisfied" with it. (It is difficult to imagine the party abandoning its core commitment to the interests of capital and big business.)

When this happens, the era of the conservative electoral dominance of identity politics will be over, and the newly prized swing voting groups in the national discourse will be, at least according to the prescient pundits and strategists, Latinos, Asians, single women and white non-Christians. After all, the groups that are rapidly expanding their percentage of the national population are always the key voting groups, at least for strategists and pundits who are concerned with more than just the next election. It will be the electoral fulfillment of the "Emerging Democratic Majority" that Ruy Teixeira and John Judis predicted at the start of this decade.

This should have a profound effect on our politics. If Democrats come to realize they do not need to cater to inherently conservative voters, they may find themselves liberated to pursue a more boldly progressive agenda. Rather than serving as an anchor that drags national politics to the right, the dominant swing groups will have the exact opposite effect. There can be little doubt that this increasingly liberal mood is connected to the changing demographics of the country. As long as Presidents and members of Congress felt accountable to conservative swing voting groups, this more progressive policy mood (like the Emerging Democratic Majority itself) struggled to take hold. That's finally about to change. ■



Which leader of the evangelical movement died of autoerotic asphyxiation while dressed in two rubber wet suits and diving gloves and slippers?

Which anti-abortion crusader bragged about having sex with a mule and featured pictures of bestiality and homosexual acts on his Web site?

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Wanted: New Voters

The Obama campaign's voter-registration drive could be the "change" we need.

by CHRISTOPHER HAYES

The Atlanta Car and Bike Show lasts for one day only, and on a recent hot summer afternoon, the line to get in snaked for hundreds of yards through the carpeted interior of the Georgia World Congress Center in downtown Atlanta. Inside the cavernous hall, live hip-hop thundered from a stage as thousands of black Atlantans meandered through the displays, scoping tricked-out cars, motorcycles and one another.

But before attendees got to the cars and music, volunteers from the Obama campaign were doing their best to make sure they spent a moment on civics. Serena Bland and her husband, Adrian, paced up and down the entrance to the hall with Register to Vote signs, urging people toward the voter-registration booth a dozen feet away. There, Anderia Bishop chatted and joked and generally poured every ounce of her considerable enthusiasm into persuading even the skeptical or indifferent that registering would be the best five minutes they ever spent. "We're chasing people through the park," Bishop said of her local volunteer group's activities. "We're going out onto the corner. This is huge. *Huge*."

A young man approached the table and was pleasantly surprised to learn that felons in Georgia who've completed probation can vote. "If I'd a-known it was this easy," he said in disbelief, "I would have been done!" After completing the form, Bishop folded it and deposited it in an ersatz ballot box. The sign beside it read, Voting Is a Sacred Right and a Moral Obligation.

A middle-aged woman with her daughter in tow took an application and began to fill it out. Not content with just one, Bishop asked the daughter if she was registered to vote. Clad in a velour turquoise jumpsuit (with short-shorts), wearing hoop earrings and snapping her gum in near caricature of insouciant youth, she shook her head. Bishop then proffered a clipboard, but the daughter pouted, "It's too much to write."

"It's not too much to write," Bishop replied sweetly but firmly, the clipboard still extended. "It takes a minute. You're gonna be here while your mother's filling it out anyway."

With that, the young woman dropped her shoulders and, with the air of a suffering martyr, took hold of the clipboard and began to fill it out.

Bishop nodded her head in quiet triumph: add another to the tally.

As the daughter sauntered off to the bar after handing Bishop the completed form, I wasn't sure whether I'd just witnessed the birth of a new voter or an exercise in futility. For the Obama campaign, which is undertaking the largest voter-registration drive in the history of presidential campaigns, victory may very well hinge on the answer.

In 2004 George W. Bush carried Georgia by eighteen points.

CHRISTOPHER SERRA

Though it has been sixteen years since a Democrat last won the state, this year, to the surprise of many, the Obama campaign has announced that Georgia is one of the twenty-three states it is targeting. By the time of the convention, it will be home to 160 field organizers in twenty offices. In June, when Obama campaign manager David Plouffe came to Washington to give a PowerPoint presentation to the press corps laying out the campaign's strategic vision for the election, he stressed that Georgia was home to 600,000 unregistered African-American voters, all of whom the campaign was going to work hard to register and turn out. "Our volume," he said of the nationwide voter-registration program, "is going to be enormous." (Obama will also likely be aided by the candidacy of Georgia native Bob Barr, running on the Libertarian ticket.)

The website Progress Illinois commissioned statistician Nate Silver to use his sophisticated electoral prediction model to estimate by just how much Obama would have to increase turnout among African-Americans in order to be competitive in some of the red states he has targeted. Silver concluded that, nationwide, each increase of 10 percent in African-American turnout from the 2004 baseline would result in about thirteen electoral votes. In Georgia, he predicted it would take a 50 percent increase in African-American turnout to put Obama at even odds to win.

Fifty percent is a massive increase: when you control for socioeconomics, African-Americans in the South vote at slightly higher levels than whites, and historically, increases in black turnout in the region have tended to provoke equal and opposite increases in white turnout for the opposing candidate. But then again, this is all uncharted territory. We've never had a black man one election away from the presidency. And there's never been a registra-

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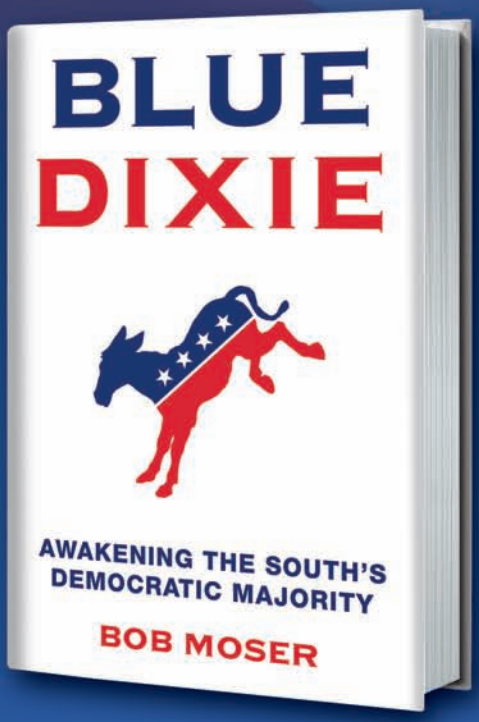

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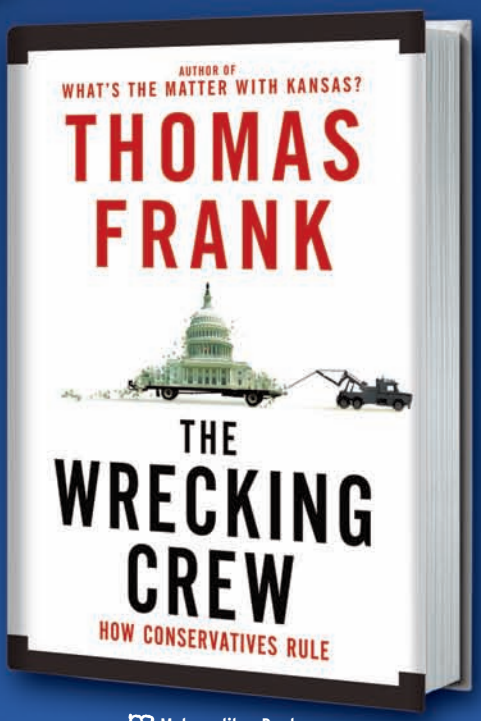

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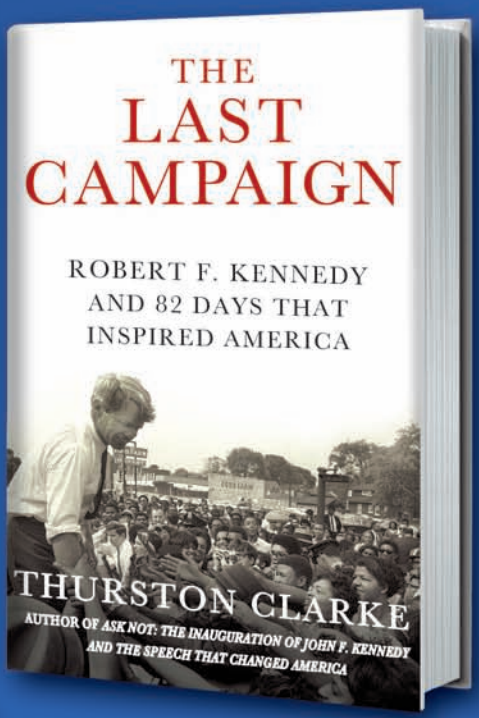

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tion effort like Vote for Change, the name the Obama campaign has given to its fifty-state registration push.

At a panel at Netroots Nation in July, Obama deputy campaign manager Steve Hildebrand described the philosophy behind the undertaking. "The way to change the political process," he said, "is to change the face of the electorate. Because it's not about getting Barack Obama elected, it's about whether we're gonna have a progressive majority."

It makes sense. The electorate is older, whiter and richer than the nation as a whole. As of 2004, there were 55 million unregistered eligible voters, among whom traditional Democratic constituencies are overrepresented. Eighty-two percent of those with bachelor's degrees are registered, while only 53 percent of those without a high school diploma are. Blacks trail whites by about ten percentage points in registration, and Latinos trail whites by almost 20 percent. Single women, who are reliably progressive, lag behind married women by thirteen points. A full eight out of ten voters over 55 are registered, but among 18- to 24-year-olds, the only age demographic Kerry won in 2004, that number is only six in ten.

'The way to change the political process,' said Obama's deputy campaign manager, 'is to change the face of the electorate.'

Given all this, one would think that a new voter approach would be a no-brainer for Democrats. But it turns out that transmuting nonvoters into voters requires a tremendous amount of painstaking labor and a massive volunteer mobilization that few campaigns have the financial or organizational resources to pull off. Indeed, before Iowa, old hands were scoffing at Obama's plan to rely on new voters, particularly the young. But youth turnout in the caucus doubled, and young voters turned out (perhaps for the first time in American history) at the same rate as senior citizens did. Clearly, the Obama campaign had figured something out that others hadn't.

Vote for Change officially kicked off May 10, with 1,000 events around the country. At a rally in Chicago, several hundred supporters showed up at Plumbers Union Hall just west of the Loop, where Chicago Congressman Danny Davis warmly congratulated them on their presence: "You look so beautiful on a Saturday morning!"

Emil Jones, president of the State Senate and a mentor of Obama's, followed Davis on stage and homed in on the campaign's historical significance: "I'm 72 years old, and I certainly hope I live long enough," he said to soft amens of agreement. "This young man is going to be President, and I wanna be around to vote for him." Mayor Richard Daley, who had been billed as a headliner, entered the room in Saturday casual and received a standing ovation from the mostly black crowd. He offered appreciation right back. "Give yourself a round of applause!" he urged the crowd, and they happily obliged.

Voter-registration drives have a particular resonance for black Chicago. Indeed, for students of Chicago politics, Daley's rapturous reception contained a dissonant note of irony; twenty-five years earlier, Daley's first campaign for mayor ran up against an unprecedented registration drive that managed to elect his rival, Harold Washington, as the city's first black mayor.

After the death of Daley's father, Richard J. Daley, in 1976, Chicago's South Side Irish machine limped along weakly, and by 1983 a small coalition of the city's black activists and businessmen were confident enough to try to put one of their own in the mayor's office. They began to organize a voter-registration drive, but when they tried to persuade the talented and savvy Congressman Washington to run, he was skeptical of his chances. He told the activists that if they registered 50,000 new black voters, he'd run. Organizing through churches, community groups and local businesses, they added more than 100,000, and Washington triumphed over Daley and incumbent Jane Byrne in the three-way Democratic primary with an unprecedented 79 percent turnout of registered black voters. That fall he beat a white Republican to become mayor.

One of the black Chicagoans who played a role in Washington's victory was the Rev. Jesse Jackson, who launched his first campaign for President the next year. In both 1984 and 1988, Jackson made voter registration a central part of his campaign strategy. His grassroots volunteers, ACORN, several unions and a coalition of civil rights groups would follow up after his events, signing up new voters and filling the rolls in state after state, especially in the South, where white Democratic politicians would later attribute their victories to what they euphemistically called the "new voter." All told, they registered between 2 million and 3 million voters in '84 and '88 combined.

Four years after Jackson's second run, a voter-registration organization called Project Vote recruited Barack Obama, just out of Harvard Law School, to spearhead another massive registration drive in Illinois. Founded in 1982 by liberal attorney Sandy Newman, Project Vote was conceived as a way to fight back against Reagan-era policies by registering the victims of those policies to vote as they stood in line at social service agencies. The project quickly grew in scale, registering poor and minority voters wherever they could be found. When Newman called Obama in 1992, Obama had just signed a contract for his first book and was hesitant about missing the deadline for his manuscript. "I didn't make any bones about the fact that this was sixty-hour-a-week work and we paid a pittance," recalls Newman. But Obama was sold.

When Obama arrived, black voter registration and turnout in Chicago were at their lowest points since record-keeping began. Over the course of a few months, Obama recruited staff and volunteers from black churches and community groups and helped train 700 deputy registrars. He put together a fund-raising committee chaired by white politicos and black business leaders, and saturated black radio with ads declaring, "It's a power thing." Project Vote fliered black neighborhoods and sent volunteers door-to-door in high-rise housing projects; minority franchise owners of McDonald's restaurants allowed people to register voters on-site and donated paid radio time

(continued on page 30)

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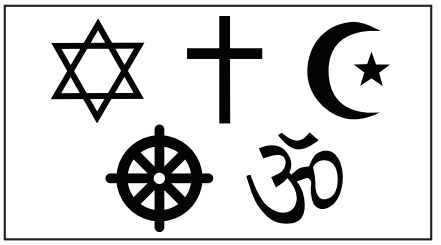
About Your Professor

Dr. Charles Kimball is Presidential Professor and Director of the Religious Studies Program at the University of Oklahoma. He received his Th.D. from Harvard University in Comparative Religion with a specialization in Islamic Studies. Dr. Kimball is an expert analyst on issues related to Islam, Jewish-Christian-Muslim relations, and the intersection of religion and politics in the United States. He is the author of the highly acclaimed book *When Religion Becomes Evil*.



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Dollars for Donkeys

Follow the money—the first rule of journalism—is easier said than done, especially when it comes to untangling the dollars, donors and lobbyists who make up Washington's hive of influence peddlers. It's also never been more vital. The GOP's reliance on corporate largess, as well as the GOP's reciprocity, have been well docu-

WALL STREET

The suits in the suites—America's commercial banks, credit card companies and securities and investment (S&I) firms—spent more than $256 million to lobby Congress in 2007–08. The $46.5 million that S&I firms have spent on lobbying this year has gone toward securing tax breaks on capital gains and dividends—with hedge funds, especially, trying to secure offshore tax loopholes now, in anticipation of a potentially less friendly Obama presidency. Credit card companies and commercial banks have traditionally given more in direct campaign contributions to the GOP than their brethren at private-equity firms, who gave $13 million more this election cycle to Democrats than to Republicans. All told, Democrats netted $68 million in campaign funds from Wall Street. In addition to in-house lobbyists, Democratic hired guns include Steve Judge, former deputy staff director of the House Committee on Banking, and Andrew Lowenthal, former legislative director to Senator Evan Bayh.

TOP SPENDERS (2007–08)	LOBBYING	$ TO DEMS
1 citi Citigroup	$12 million	$1.9 million
Citigroup spent $1.45 million on housing and finance issues alone in the first quarter of 2008. One of its targets was the bipartisan Economic Stimulus Package, into which lobbyists sneaked corporate tax cuts in an effort to recoup losses from the subprime mortgage fallout.		
2 Financial Services Roundtable	$10.9 million	$133,600
3 American Bankers Association	$10.3 million	$803,400
4 Investment Company Institute	$8.6 million	$371,800
5 JP Morgan	$8 million	$1.7 million

TOP DEMOCRATIC RECIPIENTS OF CAMPAIGN CONTRIBUTIONS (2007–08)	
1 Senator Barack Obama (IL)	$10.3 million
Goldman Sachs, JP Morgan, Citigroup and UBS are among Obama's top five donors, and many of his economic advisers come from the Wall Street–backed Hamilton Project, including Citigroup's Robert Rubin.	
2 Senator Hillary Clinton (NY)	$9 million
3 Senator Christopher Dodd (CT) Senate Banking Committee chair	$3.6 million
4 Senator Max Baucus (MT) Senate Finance Committee chair	$650,500
5 Senator Richard Durbin (IL)	$624,900

TELECOMS

In addition to spending almost $214 million to lobby Congress in 2007–08, the nation's cable TV, telecom services and telephone companies gave more than $18.2 million in campaign contributions, $10.2 million of which went to Democrats. For cable networks, a December FCC vote to loosen print-broadcast ownership restrictions in major cities was the chief priority. For telecom and telephone corporations—like Comcast, Verizon and AT&T—the big battles were net neutrality and FISA. Telecoms scurried to block legislation, like the Internet Freedom Preservation Act, that would have prevented broadband providers from creating a two-tiered, privatized web. They also pressured Congress into including in FISA retroactive legal immunity for aiding the Bush Administration's illegal wiretapping programs. All this money proved a savvy investment; the telecoms won on all three counts, with net neutrality bills never even making it out of committee.

TOP SPENDERS (2007–08)	LOBBYING	$ TO DEMS
1 Verizon	$23 million	$762,600
2 AT&T	$22.3 million	$1.2 million
3 National Cable and Telecom Association	$19.6 million	$558,700
4 Comcast	$14.4 million	$1.2 million
The nation's largest cable company and second-largest Internet provider infamously paid people off the street to pack a February FCC hearing on net neutrality, keeping rivals locked out—a strange practice in DC and even more so at Harvard University, where the hearing was held.		
5 Qualcomm	$9.4 million	$317,700

TOP DEMOCRATIC RECIPIENTS OF CAMPAIGN CONTRIBUTIONS (2007–08)	
1 Hillary Clinton	$1.4 million
2 Barack Obama	$940,700
3 Senator Jay Rockefeller (WV)	$184,400
Rockefeller's contributions from AT&T and Verizon went from zero in 2004 to more than $30,000 from each after he introduced FISA legislation that included telecom immunity. That's a pittance compared with the litigation fees that the telecoms would have faced without amnesty.	
4 Senator Mark Pryor (AR)	$136,700
5 Congressman Edward Markey (MA)	$127,700

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mented, and John McCain is no exception (see McCainsLobbyists.com). But Democrats, in control of Congress and perhaps, soon, the White House, are just as enmeshed. With the help of the Center for Responsive Politics's database (opensecrets.org), we've examined four areas where Democrats, stoked by campaign contributions and former staffers-cum-K Streeters, have sided with big business and against ordinary citizens. We present the top five spenders in each category (by total amount spent on lobbying, with campaign contributions to Democrats also listed), as well as the top five Democratic Congressional recipients. Not surprisingly, in an election year, Clinton and Obama top the stacks.

HEALTHCARE

In 1993 the health insurance industry's infamous "Harry and Louise" ads helped sink Clinton's healthcare plan, and the industry is again preparing to put its spin on healthcare reform. Big Pharma, hospitals, health professionals and HMOs spent $687 million on lobbying in 2007–08 and chipped in an additional $42 million in campaign contributions to Democrats, the first time since 1992 that they've given more to Democrats than Republicans. The backers of "Harry and Louise," America's Health Insurance Plans (AHIP), hired Beth Leonard, former New Hampshire campaign director for John Edwards, to run a campaign to preserve the private insurance system under the banner of an "American solution" to universal healthcare. Drug companies have also showered money on former Clinton staffers Steve Ricchetti, Joel Johnson and Charles Brain; Moses Mercado, a top field organizer for Barack Obama, recently took a leave from lobbying for Pfizer and United Health Group.

TOP SPENDERS (2007–08)	LOBBYING	$ TO DEMS
1 American Medical Association	$33.3 million	$463,000
2 Pharmaceutical Researchers and Manufacturers of America (PhRMA)	$31.3 million	$51,000
3 American Hospital Association	$28.7 million	$926,000
4 AMGEN	$21.7 million	$486,000
The world's largest biotech company spends more on lobbying than any other drugmaker. Prominent Democratic lobbyists on its payroll include former Baucus aides Scott Olsen and Jeff Forbes, and George Crawford, former chief of staff to Nancy Pelosi, for whom Amgen threw a 2006 fundraiser.		
5 Pfizer	$19.7 million	$557,000

TOP DEMOCRATIC RECIPIENTS OF CAMPAIGN CONTRIBUTIONS (2007–08)	
1 Barack Obama	$7.2 million
2 Hillary Clinton	$6.4 million
3 Max Baucus	$975,000
The corporate-friendly Democrat co-wrote Medicare privatization legislation in 2003. Former aides to Baucus are employed by the likes of AHIP, Amgen and PhRMA. Former top staffer Jim Messina is now chief of staff to Obama.	
4 Congressman Charles Rangel (NY) House Ways and Means Committee chair	$639,000
5 Congressman Frank Pallone (NJ)	$606,900

MORTGAGE

America's mortgage lenders spent big bucks during the housing market's boom and bust to keep the feds on the friendly, including shelling out almost $54 million in 2007–08 to lobby Congress and almost $5 million in campaign contributions—of which, for the first time in more than ten years, Democrats received the larger slice ($2.5 million, to the GOP's $2.2 million). The industry's reward? A government bailout that included $300 billion to prop up Freddie Mac and Fannie Mae, the state-chartered but privately run mortgage giants, but only $4 billion for the communities hardest hit by the foreclosure crisis. The legislation, negotiated by Senator Chris Dodd, Congressman Barney Frank and Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson, received wide bipartisan support. Democratic lobbyists include Cory Alexander, former chief of staff to House majority leader Steny Hoyer, now representing Fannie Mae, and Dwight Fettig, who spent fourteen years in the office of South Dakota Senator Tim Johnson and now directs government relations at Freddie Mac.

TOP SPENDERS (2007–08)	LOBBYING	$ TO DEMS
1 Freddie Mac	$13 million	$258,300
2 Fannie Mae	$8.5 million	$568,100
3 Mortgage Insurance Companies of America	$6.9 million	$21,900
4 Mortgage Bankers Association	$5.4 million	$329,800
5 Countrywide	$2 million	$145,000
The market leader during the housing bubble, Countrywide is being sued by several states for conning customers into loans with exorbitant rates and excessive fees. Recently acquired by Bank of America, Countrywide had been led by Angelo Mozilo, who gifted "friends" with special reduced mortgages.		

TOP DEMOCRATIC RECIPIENTS OF CAMPAIGN CONTRIBUTIONS (2007–08)	
1 Hillary Clinton	$272,600
2 Barack Obama	$266,500
3 Christopher Dodd	$135,500
Dodd was among the "friends of Angelo" who got special mortgage rates from Countrywide. Also on the list was former Fannie Mae CEO James Johnson, who led Obama's VP search until he resigned in June.	
4 Congressman Barney Frank (MA) House Financial Services Committee chair	$43,600
5 Congressman Paul Kanjorski (PA)	$37,800

Compiled by Ari Berman, Andrew Kroll, Sarah O'Leary and Susannah Vila. Design by Stephen Kling.

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(continued from page 26)

to the campaign. Other businesses, labor unions and foundations also kicked in funding.

Overall, the drive added an estimated 150,000 voters and, though nonpartisan, helped elect Carol Moseley Braun as the first black woman ever to serve in the US Senate. By the time the campaign was over, voter registrations in the nineteen predominantly black wards outnumbered those in the nineteen that were predominantly white, a first in Chicago history. Statewide, black registration went up 11 percent. It was, says Newman, "the most successful voter-registration effort in Chicago history."

Back at Plumbers Hall, the pep-rally feel gave way to the mundane logistics upon which voter registration thrives or fails. In Cook County, anyone who wants to collect registration forms must first be certified as a deputy registrar, and attaining that certification was really what the event was all about. A representative from the Cook County Clerk's office took the stage to administer the training. "You can't register people where alcohol is being served," she admonished the assembled cheerfully. "Now, turn to your manual."

There is no magic to large-scale voter-registration drives. It's just about numbers, technique and brute force.

Registering people to vote is harder than it might seem. That's by design. "The registration and the balloting system is constructed," says Frances Fox Piven, who has spent a career as an activist and academic advocating for opening up access to the ballot. "Somebody had to put it in place." In the wake of the Civil War, as Southern blacks and Northern immigrants suddenly flooded the voting booths, voter-registration requirements began cropping up, devised by established interests to make sure too many of the wrong types of people weren't voting. What was once a one-step process (people just showed up and voted) became a two-step process, and not surprisingly voting participation fell among the poor, immigrants and African-Americans—precisely the demographics those in power were attempting to keep out.

While the 1965 Voting Rights Act banned the most obviously racist uses of registration laws, many states have implemented policies, like voter-ID laws and felon disenfranchisement, that have the effect of suppressing turnout most acutely among poor, marginalized and nonwhite voters. The racial subtext of these policies is often crystal clear: opening the Alabama Constitutional Convention in 1901, which would include a provision disenfranchising anyone convicted of a crime of "moral turpitude," a legislator announced the convention's intent to "establish white supremacy in this State."

More recently, conservative state legislators have also sought to tie up would-be voter-registration drives in spools of red tape. In New Mexico, to cite just one example, a law pushed through by Republicans imposes draconian restrictions on any person or organization registering voters and entails a series of penalties for anyone who, intentionally or not, fails to comply. (The Brennan Center for Justice has filed suit, claiming the law is unconstitutional.) "What we've learned is, you have to develop a whole system to understand what the laws are," says Michael Slater, executive director of Project Vote. "Then you manage people to those laws. It becomes a very difficult process."

Slater would know. No group has quite as much experience navigating this treacherous terrain as Project Vote. Over the past two decades Project Vote, along with its frequent partner ACORN, has added several million people to the rolls. (Because of this work, ACORN has become something of a right-wing bogeyman, and its voter-registration efforts are frequently targeted for investigation, even prosecution, by zealous Republican AGs.) Precisely because registration has grown so difficult and complicated, Slater thinks the Obama campaign is going to have a "challenging time" achieving its ambitious registration goals.

Given the amount of effort the GOP has put into making it hard for marginalized people to vote, one would imagine that Democrats would put equal force behind making it easy: as a moral imperative and a political opportunity. But as a general rule, they haven't. Many reforms that Democratic politicians have pushed, like Oregon's vote-by-mail regime, succeed chiefly in making it more convenient for middle-class people to vote and do little to increase participation among poor and minority voters. Indeed, one 2005 MIT study concluded that vote-by-mail laws actually increase socioeconomic biases in the electorate.

"If all that was going on was the game of party competition, then the Democrats should want to resist obstacles put in the way of black or low-income voters," says Piven. But, she notes, "there's a great deal of uncertainty and unease about these potential voter groups. They will push for policies that the party as a whole doesn't want.… Democrats don't really want this constituency except in emergencies."

That might be true. But politicians' disinclination to pursue enfranchisement as a strategy is probably also due to the considerable obstacles to mass registration that so many states have erected, and a campaign industry allergic to innovation. Says Newman, "I think in general most progressive politicians would like to see more poor and minority voters registered. They just don't know how to do it."

There is no magic to large-scale voter-registration drives; just numbers, technique and brute force. As Project Vote has learned, turning out the newly registered *is* possible—if you capture their data and contact them, by phone and mail and in person. (Even without follow-up contact, Newman estimates, as many as 70 percent of new registrants turn out.)

But finding the unregistered is a challenge, and with no definitive list, campaigns are left to fish in promising waters: sometimes they get nibbles; sometimes they don't. Since the process is so inherently inefficient, it's simply cost-prohibitive to pay people to register voters, when those dollars can be spent on advertising, mail or door-to-door outreach to registered voters. The only way a campaign can implement a registration drive on a sufficient scale is to make sure that

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By Joseph Sugarman

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volunteers do the lion's share of the work.

That's the reason the Obama campaign can take on Vote for Change: throughout the primary, it built a nationwide organization that not only draws in volunteers by the thousands but trains and empowers them to become de facto organizers.

The vision is laid out in a 368-page manual that the campaign assembled during the waning months of the primaries and has distributed to each office. It steps through running a grassroots operation from day one to election day. "'Respect. Empower. Include.' guides everything we do," the manual stresses, noting the field organization's internal motto. "Empowerment requires creating structure that allows all members of the team to make this campaign his or her own. We must go beyond simply assigning volunteers tasks, to allowing well-trained and supported volunteers to have real ownership within the campaign."

In the abstract this can sound like anodyne management-speak, but on the ground it's real. "We didn't run a primary campaign where we said, Come and volunteer but we want you to stay as a volunteer with a tangential connection to the campaign," says Jason Green, who runs Vote for Change. "It was very much the inclusion piece that allowed us to get to this point. We have volunteer leaders that are managing other volunteers."

In the primaries, the Obama campaign built an organization that not only draws in volunteers but empowers them to become organizers.

On a Saturday morning in a bucolic park in Roswell, Georgia, north of Atlanta, I see this in action. Tamara Stevens and Sherryl Harvey are staffing a table underneath a concrete gazebo festooned with flags, Obama schwag and a sign that says Register to Vote. They're the volunteer leaders of the GA-400 for Obama group (the name comes from the highway that runs through the northern Fulton County suburbs), which boasts 350 members. And they're a microcosm of the Obama coalition: Stevens, the volunteer coordinator, is a white upper-middle-class small-business woman and lifelong Republican; Harvey, the team liaison, is a therapist who moved to Atlanta from Trinidad with her parents when she was a child.

When I arrive, Stevens is arguing with a libertarian neighbor about Obama's tax policy, about which she displays an impressive command. I ask her what prompted her conversion to Obama: "I'm not gonna lie," she says with a laugh. "It was Oprah."

She and Harvey run the operation with a combination of good cheer and businesslike efficiency: they've purchased Obama bumper stickers and pins in bulk, which they resell at retail prices, using the profit to fund the group's incidental costs. The table is spread with pens and clipboards (with an emergency cellphone number affixed to the back), all neatly aligned with reams of voter-registration cards, bottles of water and snack bars. Every Saturday and Sunday, they set up this table (what they called, in a revealing bit of organizer lingo, their "staging area") just across from a local farmers' market.

Throughout the morning, members of the GA-400, who've been alerted through e-mail, MyBarackObama.com and phone calls about the registration activities, shuffle through. When one of the regulars shows up, having failed to RSVP online, Stevens chastises her good-naturedly. "You never RSVP, and I never get you on my sheet. I'm like an anal teacher: you need to be on my attendance sheet."

Those who've already been trained sign in, grab clipboards and are directed by Stephanie Hester, the locations coordinator, to one of about a dozen high-visibility registration areas around the metro region. (Hester calls local businesses ahead of time to ask if they'll permit a table in front of their storefronts.) Those new to voter registration, like three gangly white teenagers and an elegant black woman, are assembled around the table, where Harvey gives a ten-minute training session, explaining what information is required on the forms and the stipulations of Georgia law.

There isn't a single paid staff member overseeing any aspect of the operation.

Roswell is affluent and Republican, so many of the volunteers are sent to the far reaches of the metro area to find the unregistered. Midway through the morning, I hop in the car with Hester and a few other volunteers and drive to Five Points, a neighborhood in the heart of downtown Atlanta. On a hot Saturday afternoon, it's bustling with shoppers, preachers, panhandlers and hustlers, a scene reminiscent of Times Square in the 1980s: vibrant and seedy at the same time.

Here, the entire undertaking seems a steeply uphill battle. Somewhere near 300,000 new voters were registered in Georgia in the run-up to this year's primary, which means the low-hanging fruit has already been plucked and many of those who remain unregistered are what might be called the hard cases.

The four volunteers fan out on Peachtree Street outside the MARTA stop, hawking registration in a manner not unlike the gentlemen down the block in suits and bow ties hawking the *Final Call*. We walk through a cluster of men playing three-card monte, and when Hester, who's petite, energetic and fearless, asks one if he's registered, he cuts her off, saying emphatically, "The Klan is gonna get him!" On the corner, we approach a man in a guayabera shirt and white brimmed hat who is preaching to no one in particular. "Obama is not the hope," he tells us, declining the clipboards. "God is the hope." Two young men walk by pushing strollers. Daniel Hanley, a young white man in a Got Hope? T-shirt asks if they'd like to register. They shake their heads and tell him they're both on parole. Hester then asks the Nation of Islam emissaries sharing the block if they'd like to register. "Sister," one responds sharply, "I've got a question for you. Do you think Obama is strong enough to deal with the Illuminati?"

Occasionally, our group nabs a new registrant: Hester persuades a young man loitering outside a clothing store to register after a ten-minute conversation, though his capitulation seems motivated more by interest in Hester than by politics. But it's a scattershot endeavor at best, nothing like the steady flow of registrants filing past the table over at the Car and Bike Show, where I later learned Bishop had managed to register 205 people in a single day.

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Even with the hit-and-miss approach, the GA-400 volunteers nabbed 180 registrants. All in all it was "not bad," according to Charlie Anderson, an organizer with the campaign based in Atlanta. "That's just OK for them," he texted me later. "GA 400 has gotten 365 in a day before. Most importantly, both will be at it again tomorrow."

At one level, the voter-registration push is a campaign strategy like any other: running ads in certain states at certain times, choosing and crafting a message, deciding which issues to emphasize. Like the rest of the campaign, there is a singular, overriding focus: winning. And in many of the closest states—New Mexico, for instance, where Kerry lost by 11,620 votes, or Ohio, home to several massive universities and millions of black voters—Vote for Change could provide the margin of victory.

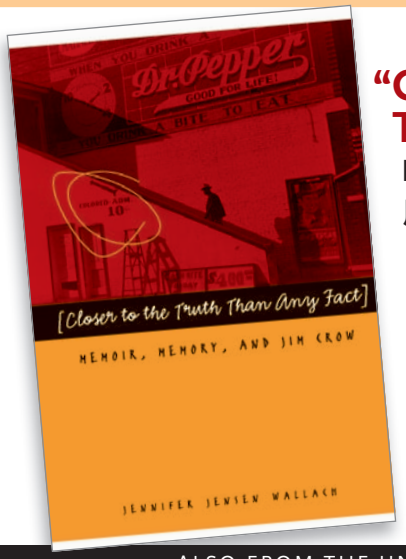
But the bigger question is whether it will make a difference, when it's time to govern, that electoral victory came thanks largely to millions of new young, black, Hispanic and poor voters. The academic literature on the topic gives some reason to hope that it will. In 2005 James Avery and Mark Peffley published a paper studying the effects of the composition of the electorate on welfare policy. What they found confirmed Sandy Newman's initial intuition: in places where working-class and poor people vote at similar levels to upper-middle-class voters, politicians are less likely to adopt strict welfare-eligibility requirements.

This is the signature principle that underlies Project Vote, as well as Piven's lifetime of activism: that a democratic society with an enfranchised constituency of the poor and marginalized will look very different from the status quo. But unless these new voters are somehow organized and capable of asserting themselves after the election, it'll be all too easy simply to take them for granted.

At a panel on the Obama campaign's organizing approach at Netroots Nation, Ohio general election director Jeremy Bird relayed an anecdote that gives a brief glimmer of what this new enfranchisement might mean for our politics.

After the Democratic primary in South Carolina, one of the most active Obama volunteers in the city of Florence, a 37-year-old attorney named Steve Wukela, decided to run for mayor against a thirteen-year incumbent named Frank Willis. Wukela ran at Willis from his left. With a motto of "Real Democrat for Real Change," he castigated Willis for having donated to George W. Bush and for standing by "while sales taxes were increased on the poorest among us, shifting the burden to those least able to afford it." Wukela activated the volunteers he'd met going door-to-door for Obama, implementing a voter-contact model he'd been trained in by the campaign and reaching out to new voters. "Everyone said, Steve, that's nice, the Obama campaign was nice, but you probably shouldn't try to unseat a thirteen-year incumbent," explained Bird. "You're getting a little ahead of yourself."

But there was a constituency for change, thanks in part to the voter-registration activities of the Obama campaign, which had registered 8,000 new voters in Florence during the primary. And when votes in the mayoral election were tallied, Wukela had eked out an upset. By one vote. ■



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Organizing & Obama: A Forum

Barack Obama often says that the best education he got wasn't at Harvard but on the streets of the South Side of Chicago, where he worked as a community organizer for three years. His formative experience as an organizer has seemed to carry through to his campaign, which has hired more organizers and invested more in grassroots activity than any campaign in recent memory. At campaign events, Obama will often recount his experience as a community organizer, working long hours for paltry pay and little recognition, before bringing a few of the local organizers from his campaign onstage to thank them and allow them to bask in the audience's applause. This summer the campaign has recruited 3,600 Obama Fellows, volunteers deployed around the country who will spend six weeks getting trained in organizing and working with grassroots supporters. Joy Cushman, who runs the fellows program, calls it the biggest organizing training in history.

So what does it mean that we might have a President who was a community organizer? How do organizers view the Obama campaign, and what would this resurgence in grassroots organizing mean for an Obama presidency? On the eve of the Democratic National Convention, *The Nation* reached out to five community organizers from across the country to discuss these and other issues. Washington editor **Christopher Hayes** conducted the interviews, of which an edited transcript follows. **Angelica Salas** is executive director of the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles. **Anton Gunn** has served as the South Carolina political director for the Obama campaign and as executive director of South Carolina Fair Share. He's currently running for State Representative. **Ana Garcia-Ashley** is co-director of the Civil Rights of Immigrants department of the Gamaliel Foundation. **Arnie Graf** has been an organizer with the Industrial Areas Foundation. **Deepak Bhargava** is executive director of the Center for Community Change.

I guess I should start with the most basic question, which is: what is community organizing? I think at some point the Obama campaign realized that people probably had no idea what the heck "community organizer" meant. So how do you guys explain what you do?

GRAF: My father is 94 and I'm still trying to explain it to him. [Laughs.] The best way to think about it is to look at all the massive decisions that are being made with no input from people in civic society. It's all made between the private sector and the government. All the rest of us, we're not even in the conversation. We're being taken for granted. So as organizers, we want to enable people to not just be a subject of history but to write it themselves. We try to build power among communities so they can engage the public and private sector. A big part of that is recruiting, training and developing leadership, and trying to build that leadership across geography, race, class, culture, ethnicity.

BHARGAVA: It's worth noting that community organizing has changed in some pretty fundamental ways since Obama had his formative experiences as an organizer. Obama left organizing partly because he thought the scale of the problems facing poor communities could not be addressed by isolated neighborhood groups, no matter how good their methods. And he was right. What's happened is that over the last ten years, lots of groups have moved up the chain to address public policy issues at the state and even the federal levels: taxation, healthcare, wages, immigration reform. Also, electoral politics was anathema to most community organizing groups a decade ago, but today the vast majority view it as a necessary component of any strategy to build power for poor and working people in this country. So there's been a kind of convergence: Obama and the field of organizing from which he emerged have moved in similar directions in how they conceive of power and social change.

One thing that has cropped up in the campaign recently is the issue of pragmatism. Obama's taken some heat for compromising, even reversing, some positions. Saul Alinsky famously counseled organizers to encounter the "world as it is" and not the world as we want it to be. I wonder if you see Obama's positioning as a manifestation of his organizing background or just a politician being a politician.

GRAF: He's operating as Senator Obama more than he is as an organizer. Sure, the organizing paradigm is always in contention with the world as it is and the world as it should be—Obama uses this a lot in his talks. But as an organizer, you've got a constituency of leaders who you're in discussion with, and if there's some kind of deal offered that will get you part of the way to what your goal is, they vote and determine if they're gonna take it. I don't know who his constituency is.

SALAS: Yeah, you really need to consider from what vantage point you're seeing the "world as it is." When you're an organizer you become deeply connected with people who are struggling, people who haven't had access to the democratic process to voice their concerns. That's where we stand. In a campaign there are a lot of competing interests. I just think at the end of the day, Obama needs to decide where he stands and who he's looking out for.

BHARGAVA: Even the best Presidents need social movements to accomplish transformational change. FDR could not have succeeded without the agitation of the unemployed workers' councils and the unions, and LBJ's greatest accomplishments were made possible by the civil rights movement. The field of organizing is itself being called by the times to step up to that challenge of movement building from below.

It always struck me as interesting that "organizing" is something that campaigns ostensibly do, but the way they do it is very different from the kind of community organizing you all do. So what's the overlap between the skills you learn as an organizer and those you learn as a politician?

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If foreign oil has us over a barrel now, what happens when our population increases by another 100 million?

As rising fuel prices put renewed pressure on family budgets, many worry price increases will continue. Some recall the mile-long gas lines years ago when Americans had to compete for a share of dwindling energy supplies. With America's population at a record 300 million today, supplies are again tight in spite of record high prices. And the U.S. Census Bureau projects that another 110 million people will be added to our population between 2000 and 2040*. What will happen to energy prices then? Not to mention food and other resources. Fortunately, there is some hope. Americans are already consuming less. Alternative fuel sources are now being vigorously pursued. And another major leap in population is avoidable if we all work together. According to the Pew Hispanic Research Center, 82% of America's projected population increase between 2005 and 2050 will result from immigration. If we can continue reducing our energy consumption, begin leveraging alternative fuels and agree on a reasonable plan to reduce immigration, we may be able to reduce the threat of even higher prices tomorrow. Aren't we all tired of foreign interests having us over a barrel?

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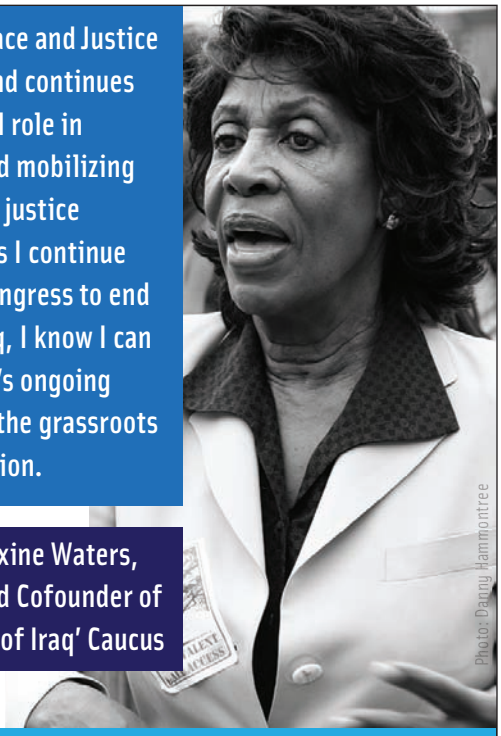
United for Peace and Justice has played, and continues to play, a vital role in organizing and mobilizing the peace and justice movement. As I continue my work in Congress to end the war in Iraq, I know I can count on UFPJ's ongoing leadership in the grassroots antiwar coalition.

Rep. Maxine Waters, Chair and Cofounder of the 'Out of Iraq' Caucus



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MILITANT ATHEISM: A THREAT TO CIVIL LIBERTIES?

In Defense of Religion is a book that attacks head-on and in detail the recent anti-religion books by Christopher Hitchens, Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, and Daniel Dennett. It alerts readers to the implications of their intolerant thinking for democracy and personal freedom.

It also makes a case for the great religions at their best and re-thinks what religion essentially is. It proposes that science go beyond question-begging rationalist assumptions and study devotion, worship, mysticism, and the miraculous.

The author, John Gibson (John W. Gibson Jr.) has also written Against Fundamentalism and Plato.

Published by Wheatmark

GUNN: Having an organizing background actually makes you a better candidate because you're trained to listen to what people say and what people don't say. My experience is that you use the same skills in both: understanding people's common interests and how to coalesce around a common cause. The only marked difference is that when you're a candidate the constituency you're trying to organize is much larger, so you have to appeal to a broader range of people. People might see that and think you're selling out or acting like a politician, but it's more that you have a lot of people in your constituency who might not share your worldview.

GRAF: What Anton was saying is correct, but I still think that what you're doing as an organizer has a different purpose. You have to have the capacity to relate to many different interests, sure, but when you're organizing you don't have to get 51 percent of a community.

SALAS: What I find with politicians is the unwillingness to face tension, to embrace it, then to decide, Yeah, this is where we need to be. As a community organizer, that's what I'm hungry for. Particularly on comprehensive immigration reform, which we desperately need, it's incredibly painful right now when you have elected officials who are afraid to take action, to take risks. I think community organizing is about taking risks.

It seems strange that Obama got his start as an organizer, because he does seem so cautious. Even in Dreams From My Father *you see how he has a hard time coming to terms with the confrontational part of organizing.*

GARCIA-ASHLEY: Yeah, I disagree that he's somehow scared of confrontation. I see it as being more strategic, not being reckless. Look, when I was organizing to close down 300 drug houses, we were confrontational with the chief of police, even with the drug dealers themselves. That's the model that works for that environment. But then when we tried to get the governor to create treatment instead of prisons, we began to execute a different, less confrontational strategy. We needed to consider legislators from very small towns, and business interests, and at the end of the day we won that fight at the state level. We got a treatment bill passed.

I think a lot is being said about Obama's more collegial or collaborative ways of viewing the world, but the question is, Is he more averse to confrontation or more of a strategic thinker?

For me, I didn't need to learn to be confrontational. I'm Dominican, I grew up in the South Bronx and I was born to be an organizer. What needed to be developed in me was the compromising part and actually being able to see the other side. So I think I have an appreciation, particularly after fifteen years of organizing, for that ability. And that's what I see in Barack.

It's funny you bring up learning to be an organizer, because one of the most striking things about this campaign, particularly the Obama Fellows program, is that it represents quite possibly the largest organizing training in history. They've got this 368-page training manual with the motto "Respect, Empower, Include." What do you think are the implications of having this whole new cadre of people equipped with this set of tools?

GRAF: I'm very hopeful about that. For quite some time there's been a sense that basic organizing is passé. You do the TV ads,

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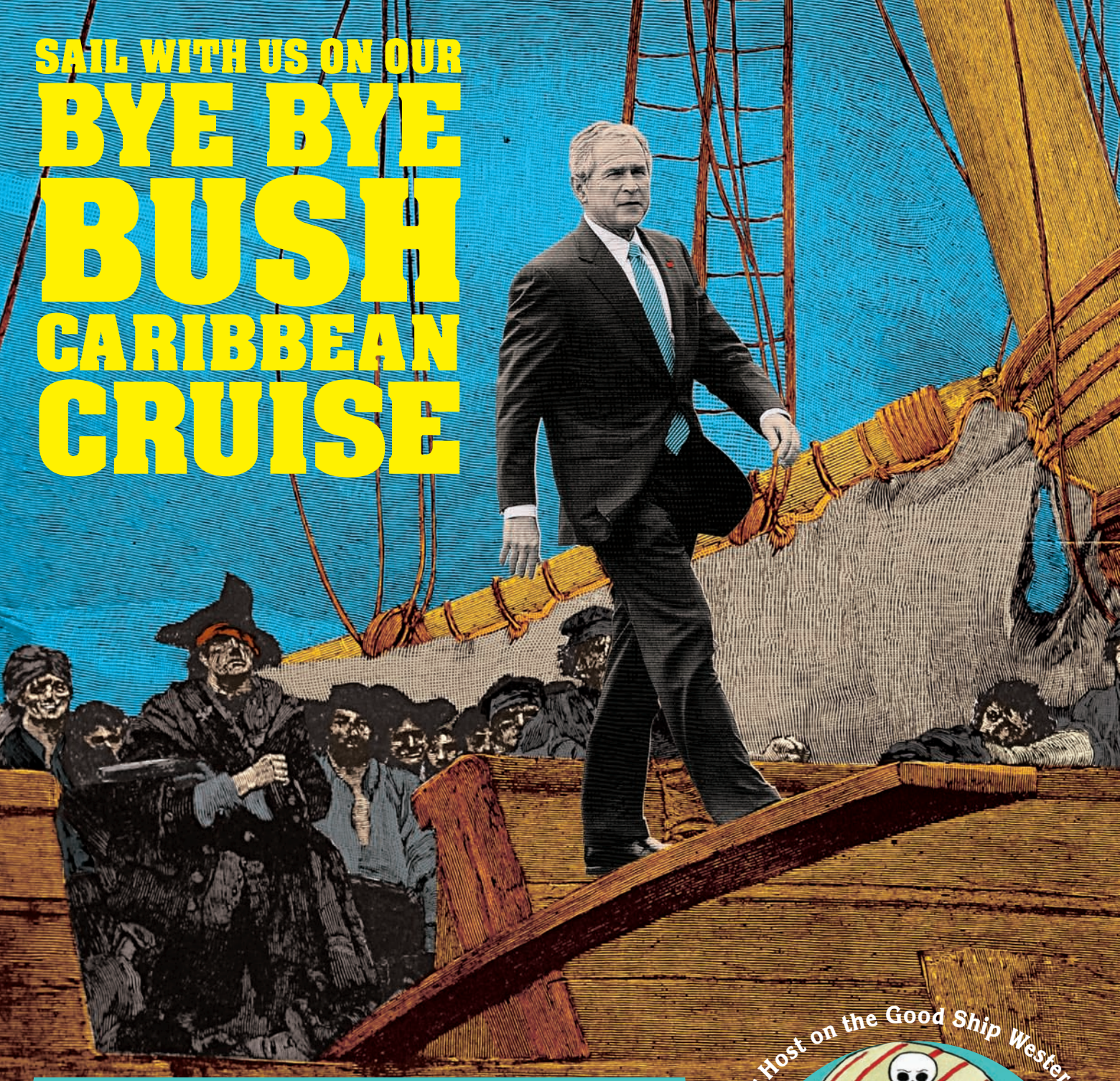

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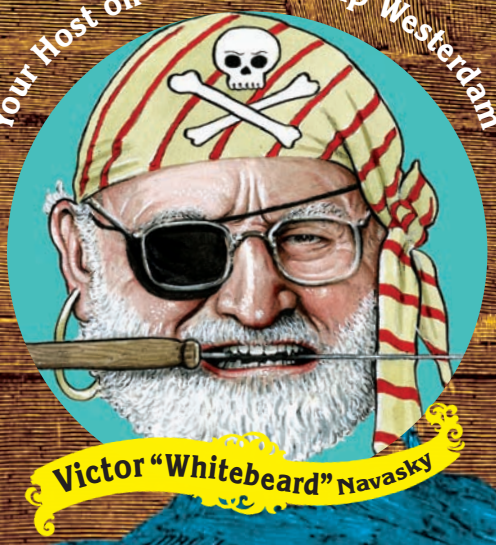

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you do the commercials and you do very little to engage people face to face. But if they're really training people in some of the basic skills and concepts of organizing, then I think it's going to bring us into a politics that's more face to face. That's good for everyone.

GUNN: When I was running meetings in South Carolina, I would tell every young person that came in to be a field organizer, Take this seriously because this is life-changing work that you're doing. The skills you're learning—how to do a one-on-one, how to do a house meeting, how to identify leaders—you will use for the rest of your life, no matter what you do. The investment our organizers were making in developing community leadership is going to translate twenty years from now. It's a blueprint, and I don't think you can underscore enough how important that is.

BHARGAVA: One of the single most important contributions that Obama has already made to social change in America is the enormous recognition he has given through his bully pulpit to the work of organizing.

Obama supporters recently used MyBarackObama.com, the campaign social networking site, to organize opposition to his support of the FISA bill. I wonder if you think we'll see more of this if Obama wins: people using the tools and networks that have been developed through the campaign to actually pressure Obama and the Democratic Party to deliver.

GRAF: First, there's always the worry that if people don't see immediate change, they'll get disillusioned and say, We tried getting involved and it didn't work. The other worry I have is that the people who've supported him won't want to take him on. God knows, anything is better than what we have now. And let's give him what is fair. But there's gonna be a lot of pressure to just lay off the guy. So I think organizers would have an easier time, with the skills they've learned, in challenging McCain than Obama. It's a more straightforward enterprise.

That to me is a central dilemma we'll be wrestling with at The Nation.

SALAS: From the perspective of a possible future Obama administration, that's where I hope he truly is comfortable with community organizing. And I mean not just doing it but having it done to him. I think this is an opportunity for us on the outside as organizers to be prepared and take our space and move forward and engage to make change real. We've been discussing the idea of, how do we have both the politics of protest and the politics of engagement and embracing those two perspectives at the same time and getting things done. In California we had a Democratic governor, Democratic Assembly and Democratic State Senate, but little changed because the community organizations were not mature enough to push and engage at the same time.

At this point the whole idea is, as soon as he comes into office, to be there consistently. To not take anything for granted. To be present. ■

Letters

(continued from page 2)

number of pages as the weekly offerings, qualifies as nothing less than biweekly, bi-Orwellian "quadruplespeak"—deftly making half as much sound like twice as much. Madison Avenue and the Bush Administration must bow in awe at such sly spin!

J. David Buckwalter

Whale Ho!

La Mirada, Calif.

E.L. Doctorow delights this reader ["The White Whale," July 14]. No matter the seriousness of subject, his sentences are perfectly constructed and warrant two readings: the first for content, the second for art's sake.

Jeanne Khan

Geneseo, N.Y.

"The White Whale" was so exceptionally astute, literate, analytically and historically acute and thoughtfully focused on what we are all living through today in America. To know that someone has put the feelings of so many of us on paper in this age of digital technology pleases me enormously.

Sue Rabe

Lethal Legacy

Cambridge, Mass.

Spencer Ackerman, in "The American Way of Spying" [July 14], claims that Tim Weiner's *Legacy of Ashes* is "the greatest book ever written about the CIA" and that if another writer "produces a book about the CIA half as insightful, thorough or penetrating, he or she can be proud of the achievement." *Legacy of Ashes* is very welcome indeed, but it is by no means twice as good—or even half as good—as William Blum's *Killing Hope: U.S. Military and CIA Interventions Since World War II*. Too much of Weiner's book is devoted to reporting agency incompetence and bureaucratic conflict—useful, but not nearly as valuable as Blum's comprehensive inventory of the lethal results of CIA covert operations over six decades.

Even more important, Weiner's understanding of the real (rather than the stated) goals of US foreign policy is shallow. "A nation that wants to project its power beyond its borders," he writes, "needs…a first-rate spy service." It never occurs to him to explore the meaning, much less the consequences, of "projecting our power." Blum, by contrast, makes very clear that maximizing economic penetration and control, both local and international, by US financial and business elites is the *ultima ratio* of US foreign policy and the defining framework of CIA activity. Without this understanding, no chronicle, however accurate or colorful, of CIA history can be much more than sound and fury.

George Scialabba

Soap Out Your Mouth

Los Angeles

If you ever repeat the phrase "Commander in Chief" in its incomplete and misleadingly truncated form, I will personally fund any and all conservative efforts against your magazine. This lie must die. There is no "Commander in Chief." The correct phrase, from our Constitution, is that "the President shall be Commander in Chief of United States Armed Forces." The omission of the latter part of the phrase transforms the head of the military into the tyrant of the nation. Anyone who supports such a transformation has injured the Republic and aided the oppression of the American people.

Doug Wichert

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Books & the Arts.

Orthogonian Visions

by THOMAS J. SUGRUE

To borrow a colorful phrase that Newt Gingrich coined to lambaste his Democratic critics, I was a "counterculture McGovernik," albeit a premature one. In the election of 1972, my locker partner John Murphy and I ran the fifth-grade McGovern/Shriver campaign at St. Mary of Redford School in northwest Detroit. We lost big. Of the eighty or so kids in Sister Zita and Sister Mary Ann's classes, only about a fifth joined us in supporting the Democratic ticket. The one black student in the class was with us. We also had a strong hunch that Sisters Zita and Mary Ann, both enthusiastic about the post–Vatican II liberalization of the Catholic Church, were closet McGovern supporters. But most of our classmates, just like their white working- and middle-class parents, voted for the re-election of Richard Nixon and Spiro Agnew.

I didn't know about "acid, amnesty and abortion" at the tender age of 10, but my parents did—as did most of my classmates' moms and dads. Some of them patrolled our neighborhood at night, their eyes alert for any black person lurking on a white-only block, who could be there for only one reason: to commit a crime. As parochial school parents whose children were safe from court-mandated school desegregation, they still joined the cry against "forced busing," which they considered a form of utopian social engineering perpetrated by out-of-touch elites. And as the city's economy spiraled downward, the result of stagflation, the oil crisis and deindustrialization, they found a ready villain in affirmative action, a cousin to welfare fraud, both of them examples of blacks taking something they didn't deserve right out of white folks' thin wallets. Many parents lost sleep at night fretting over their teenage children succumbing to the freshly mainstreamed temptations of marijuana and premarital sex. For them, the election of 1972 was about holding the liberal horsemen of the apocalypse at bay.

Counterculture McGoverniks and anxious parents alike, we were all inhabitants of what Rick Perlstein calls Nixonland, a nation where "two separate and irreconcilable sets of apocalyptic fears coexist in the minds of two separate and irreconcilable groups of Americans." Perlstein is the hypercaffeinated Herodotus of the American Century, an indefatigable researcher who has assembled material from the pages of every major newspaper, weekly magazine and nearly every history of the 1960s—important or obscure—into the raucous and gripping narrative of *Nixonland*. He offers a convincing explanation of how and why some 60 percent of the American electorate joined my classmates' parents in casting their lot with the Republican Party in one of the greatest landslides in American history, just eight years after

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Delegates on the third night of the Republican National Convention in Miami, August 23, 1972

Nixonland
The Rise of a President and the Fracturing of America.
By Rick Perlstein.
Scribner. 881 pp. $37.50.

Thomas J. Sugrue, Kahn Professor of History and Sociology at the University of Pennsylvania, is the author of Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North, *forthcoming this fall from Random House.*

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Daily reports from inside and outside the convention hall.

they had swept Lyndon Johnson into office, leading the ever hyperbolic Texan to declare that "these are the most hopeful times since Christ was born in Bethlehem."

Like Perlstein's first book, *Before the Storm*, an account of Barry Goldwater and the rise of the New Right, *Nixonland* is peopled with strongly drawn characters: angry conservatives, raging leftists, hubristic liberals, Nixon and his operatives, and a news media that amplified and exaggerated their voices to great effect. But the most important protagonists in Perlstein's epic are white Middle Americans, those working-class and precariously middle-class folks like my parents who stood horrified on the sidelines of the cultural and political civil war of the 1960s until they found succor in the politics of resentment and polarization. Perlstein skimps on describing the lives his Middle Americans were living, but he does offer a vivid portrayal of their visions of a social cataclysm, stoked by media-savvy operatives in the orbit of Tricky Dick. He reads the papers they read, listens to the speeches they heard and, perhaps most important, sits on the couch and joins them in watching countless hours of television.

The heart of *Nixonland* is an account of the dysfunctional triangular relationship between Middle America, the news media and that bitter but endlessly creative Californian who lost his bid for the presidency in 1960, in large part because of his inability to master the new genre of TV, and won in 1968 largely by turning the medium to his advantage. The '60s was a war of representations, as the news media, ever hungry for conflict and ever prone to simplification, fashioned a Manichaean world of good and evil, discipline and debauchery, white and black, mainstream and counterculture—all shadowed by the question "What side are you on?" Rather than attempting to bridge divisions or, better yet, to solve the underlying problems that produced them, Nixon pegged his future on exploiting them. In one of his most memorable locutions, Perlstein defines the polarities with terms from Nixon's life: "Franklins" versus "Orthogonians," the names of two student societies at Nixon's Whittier College. The former was made up of hale fellows well met and the latter, Nixon's own creation, was a big tent of the square, the hardworking, those not to the manor born. Nixon's Orthogonian vision, one of a society composed of haughty, out-of-touch cultural elites lording it over the "silent majority," became his most enduring contribution to American political discourse, the perfect language to make sense of the tumultuous '60s. Peace would come only when the Orthogonians once and for all put the Franklins in their rightful place.

Perlstein's overview of the late 1960s and early '70s, more so than anything in print, captures the cacophony, madness and bitterness that pervaded the social and political movements of the era, even if his account of fracturing and division, of extremism, violence and revolutionary delusion recapitulates a familiar story line. But Perlstein is too smart to stumble into the obvious pitfalls of '60s historiography. He rejects the old saw that before the '60s, America was dominated by a "liberal consensus," writing instead of the "supposed American consensus." Influential grand narratives of the '60s by writers as diverse as Allen Matusow, Thomas and Mary Edsall, Michael Tomasky, Ronald Radosh and Todd Gitlin put the onus of responsibility for the "unraveling of America" on liberals and the late New Left. But unlike the previous generation of '60s scholars, Perlstein is neither a liberal who was mugged, nor a cranky neoconservative pining for the "proud decades" of the 1940s and '50s, nor a white New Leftist wistfully recalling the days before Maoists took over Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), nor a wannabe revolutionary longing for a rebirth of the Weathermen or the Republic of New Africa.

No one emerges unscathed in *Nixonland*. Perlstein is unsparing in his accounts of liberal hubris, especially on the Vietnam War (though he is also, surprisingly and correctly, more charitable toward Johnson's domestic policies than most of LBJ's critics). He unflinchingly and unromantically describes the self-destructive impulses that coursed through much of the left, and he offers a useful antidote to the historical amnesia about the violence and extremism of the right. In a gripping account of the 1967 Newark riots, he reminds us that white vigilantes took to the streets and that most of the deaths came at the hands of "scared officers of the law committing officially sanctioned murder." He also recounts the grim history of right-wing terrorism that flourished in the late '60s with far more devastating consequences than the well-publicized acts of revolutionary bravado by the Weathermen and the Black Panthers. In 1968 alone anti-Castro Cuban radicals bombed thirteen sites in New York City, the British Consulate in Los Angeles and the Mexican government's tourist office in Chicago. And in Connecticut, survivalist Minutemen raided a pacifist commune and battled the police. Of the clashes between "insurgents and patriots," writes Perlstein, the "two sides were not symmetrical. Only one had the power to put the other in jail."

That said, Perlstein shares the mainstream media's fascination with conflict, and

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in so doing he downplays the mostly forgotten history of countless activists, particularly liberals and leftists, who eschewed chiliastic rhetoric and worked for social change mostly out of the glare of the flashbulbs and TV cameras. In their search for tele-worthy stories of violence and conflict, the media favored certain groups and ignored others. In his recent history of the NAACP, *Freedom's Sword*, Gil Jonas, who was the civil rights organization's publicist in the mid-'60s, recounts the difficulties in placing executive director Roy Wilkins on talk shows after Black Power burst onto the scene. Producers gave airtime to the Black Panthers and other radicals, but in the overheated climate of the late '60s, "moderate" leaders like Wilkins were too mainstream and ultimately not newsworthy. The result was a great exaggeration of the power and influence of groups like the Panthers that had, at best, a few thousand members nationwide. The NAACP, by contrast, was one of the largest mass-membership organizations in the country, with more than 460,000 members in 1969. Likewise, the media headlined the Weathermen, a minuscule sect that broke from SDS, while ignoring the thousands of everyday organizers who defended tenants, set up food cooperatives and created health clinics. And while a handful of radical feminists monopolized media accounts for their theatrical protests at the Atlantic City Miss America pageant in 1968, working-class and liberal feminists were engaged in mostly invisible but ultimately more newsworthy actions like lobbying Congress and litigating the anti–sex discrimination provisions of the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

The relentless barrage of images of disruption fertilized the darkest imaginings of people like my parents. In their minds, the simultaneity of urban riots, sexual liberation and the expansion of the liberal state could not be mere coincidence. Of crime, welfare and pornography, Perlstein writes, "All this moral anarchy; all of it felt linked." Nothing mattered more than the poisonous politics of race, which Perlstein expertly traces from the Northern backlash against open housing in the election of 1966 to the twists and turns of Nixon's civil rights program, which led him to embrace the states' rights, anti-busing but ostensibly colorblind politics of Goldwater as the GOP reached out to angry urban whites and latter-day Dixiecrats bitter at the Democratic Party's betrayal of their "way of life." Perlstein brings more than a little outrageous gallows humor to the story, whether it be his characterization of Georgia's racist Governor Lester Maddox as

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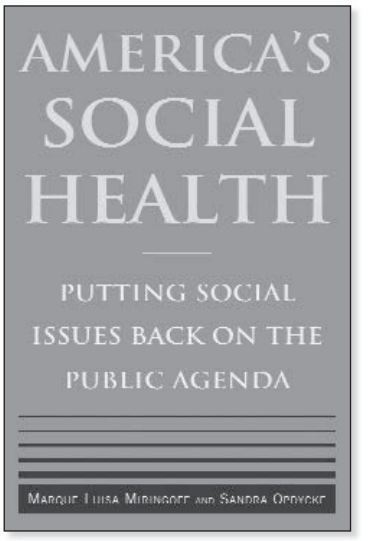

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"Saint Lester of the Blessed Ax Handle" or his description of Nixon's appeal to disaffected Iowa Democrats who "were afraid that Martin Luther King would send Negro biker gangs to rape their children."

The mainstream media's exaggeration of the power of radical social movements—compounded by activists' self-aggrandizing sense of their place in history—played right into the hands of Nixon and his aides. Perlstein's most important contribution is to describe the ways Nixon manipulated representations of chaos, amplifying them for political gain. It is a truism of 1960s history that John F. Kennedy was the first master manipulator of the new medium of television. The camera loved JFK, and he loved it back. Lyndon Johnson, by contrast, had a troubled relationship with the major networks, railing against their critical coverage of the war, committing gaffes like showing off the scar from his gall bladder surgery and then, in his darkest moments, avoiding the media altogether. For their part, increasingly skeptical journalists rewarded him by highlighting his Administration's credibility gap. By contrast, Nixon and his team fashioned a media strategy that was far more effective than Johnsonian cussing and tantrum-throwing. (Nixon did a lot of that as well, mostly in private and often with the tape recorder on—but he seldom let his anger interfere with plots of manipulation and revenge.) Nixon's crack media team completely changed the rules of the game, in ways that continue to shape American electoral politics.

Among the extraordinary team of image-makers Nixon assembled in 1968 was the 26-year-old Roger Ailes, the "TV producing prodigy" who by 25 had one media miracle to his name. He had turned Philadelphia talk-show host Mike Douglas into a "national icon of square chic." Nixon, edgy, sweaty and never photogenic, was a more difficult but more rewarding charge. Ailes carefully staged climate-controlled "televized panel shows" packed with rank-and-file Republicans to give the impression that Nixon was one of the people, not some out-of-touch, meddling social engineer. Nixon's ad team also produced brilliantly effective campaign spots, with ominous music and shots of angry protesters and rubble-strewn streets, which captured Americans' anxieties about civil disorder.

Nixon's message was massaged into words by a peerless team of speechwriters led by Pat Buchanan and William Safire. Buchanan captured the anger and resentments of white Middle America, especially those of working-class Catholics (Protestant America's religious Orthogonians), while the protean wordsmith Safire coined sonorous turns of phrase to highlight Nixon's presidential qualities and catchy locutions like "nattering nabobs of negativism" to help Spiro Agnew further his agenda of "positive polarization." From the 1968 campaign through Watergate, Nixon's handlers devised another brilliant strategy to highlight his law-and-order politics: they admitted a few angry protesters into rallies and let them shout out some epithets. Forewarned, Nixon turned them into his unwitting tools, using their appearance as evidence of the need for law and order. Nothing was more effective an appeal to America's Orthogonians than for the square, awkward Nixon to put a few long-haired AmeriKKKa-hating Franklins in their place.

Not unlike Nixon, most historians of the '60s can't get past 1968. Everything thereafter is tragic denouement. But that year comes and goes (with fireworks) less than halfway through *Nixonland*. Perlstein's detailed account of domestic and international politics in Nixon's first term is a reminder that, in many respects, the disruption and violence had only just begun. One of the many ironies of the Nixon Administration was that the Orthogonian who was elected promising to undo liberalism's excesses and put a lid on protest utterly failed. During the campaign of 1968, Nixon pledged that he had a secret plan to end the Vietnam War, yet once in office he escalated the war and commenced the bombing of Cambodia. The law-and-order President was as powerless as his predecessor to curb campus unrest, which swelled in 1969 and 1970. Black Power activists grew even more vocal in his first years in office. Feminism was stronger than ever during the years of the Nixon Administration. And although Nixon had nary a good word to say about gays and lesbians, their visibility grew on his watch. Even crime, which Nixon highlighted in his 1968 campaign, skyrocketed, and he couldn't do anything about it. Nixon presided over a country that followed a course his supporters despised.

But as Perlstein shows, Nixon did not want to restore order. Instead, he stoked the fires of discontent to shape an enduring conservative majority. He needed polarization and disruption, so long as liberals would keep taking the fall. Nixon succeeded brilliantly in blaming the Democrats for just about everything unpopular. Liberals took the heat for

Along With Whatever Has Not Yet Been Named

Take if you will this improbable boy,
skin like August arcing toward its apex,
heat sheen across the highway, hazy
gloss on the way things seem, in transit
from one state to another. Raised by the same god
of vacant Sunday parking lots
and imported palm trees, natives of nothing
near home, he comes from the high sound
of his own voice, his skin sings something
he can't recall, a sudden wind through yellow-
brown palm fronds, rising and as quickly gone,
rising and subsiding all at once, at one
with nothing held in place.

Take if you will this boy made out
of wish and will-not-ever-be, made out
to be something he's not, breeze
through the trees. Puzzle his riddling
skin, his irrigated desert
body couched in eroding
mountains. Ride out the rustling sibilants
and make a man into an effigy:
of summer skin, the last exemplar.

REGINALD SHEPHERD

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school busing. When white voters rallied against programs like affirmative action, which the Nixon Administration implemented, the White House pointed its finger at the Democrats, who were not about to abandon a civil rights program even if it was not of their making. And when the Senate rejected right-wing segregationist Supreme Court nominee G. Harrold Carswell, Nixon took the occasion of a nationally televised speech to upbraid liberals and openly empathize with "the bitter feelings of millions of Americans who live in the South about the action of regional discrimination that took place in the Senate yesterday." Nixon even cheered the 1970 protests in New York where construction workers brutally attacked peace protesters. "Thank God for the hard hats!"

In the climate of antagonism that he fostered, Nixon grew increasingly conspiratorial. Rather than resting content with the wizardry of his image-makers, he pioneered especially devious tactics to burnish his image and undermine his critics. To guarantee that the news media got the message that ordinary Americans were displeased with criticism of the President, Nixon aides set up a nationwide letter-writing campaign, flooding the press with letters, posted from all over the country, carefully drafted by party operatives expressing their outrage at the liberal media. It was a steep and slippery slope from there to using IRS audits to harass Administration enemies, and from there to the break-ins that led to Watergate. Perlstein builds on the well-documented histories of Nixon's paranoid and effective tactics to neutralize his opponents leading up to the 1972 election. The story here is familiar, but Perlstein's telling is wonderfully rich, right down to his detailed accounts of "ratfucking" that Nixon's campaign perfected—from planting spies in Democratic campaign offices to sending out fake letters attributed to Democratic front-runner Edmund Muskie.

Perhaps the only place where *Nixonland* falls flat—and where its thesis overreaches—is its discussion of the Nixon Administration itself. Presidents don't just run for office; they establish policy priorities, shape legislation and issue executive orders. Nixon's politics and his Administration's rhetoric were so lurid and inflammatory that it is easy to view the entire history of the Administration through the distorting prism of its dirty tricks. Perlstein acknowledges that Nixon did not care much about domestic politics; as the President once said, "I've always thought the country could run itself domestically without a president." But just because he was indifferent to everyday policy-making doesn't mean that his Administration was. The work of the executive branch went on, sometimes with agents of polarization and division wreaking havoc. (Perlstein offers a particularly juicy tale of a young lawyer in the obscure Office of Telecommunications Policy named Antonin Scalia, who drafted a series of memos about turning the Corporation for Public Broadcasting into a tool of the White House.) But many of Nixon's key policies were shaped by Rockefeller Republicans. The efforts of bureaucrats slogging away in the cubicles of the Department of Labor or regulators in the Department of Energy were seldom newsworthy. But they were enormously influential.

On policy matters, Perlstein's judgments are sometimes too polar. For example, he argues that Nixon embraced affirmative action solely to aggravate the split between blacks and labor in the Democratic Party. This is true—but by no means the whole story. Nixon aides also hoped to buy off black discontent, and some saw it as a relatively cost-free way to improve the economic opportunities of blacks (for a short time some even, quite wrongly, believed they could capture black votes). While Nixon exploited

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the hot-button issue of busing to foster racial division, his Administration created the Office of Minority Business Enterprise and even appointed some prominent civil rights activists, including Congress of Racial Equality founder James Farmer, to administrative posts. The Nixon Administration expanded funding for bilingual education, giving the controversial program legitimacy and political legs. Above all, Nixon had to cut deals with the still-overwhelmingly Democratic House and Senate. Perhaps the most far-reaching and long-term legacy of the Nixon Administration was its dramatic expansion of the regulatory powers of the state: the Occupational Safety and Health Administration and the Consumer Product Safety Commission were just two. Perlstein interprets Nixon's creation of the Environmental Protection Agency, rather implausibly, as an attempt to undercut governmental power. Tell that to the antiregulators who have spent the past three decades trying to eviscerate it.

Indeed, to scrutinize Nixon's policy record is to learn why so many of his fiercest critics came from the right. In 1971 the ever volatile Pat Buchanan penned an angry memo complaining that conservatives "are the niggers of the Nixon administration." To *National Review* publisher William Rusher, Nixon's expansion of the regulatory power of government was apostasy, and he called on all good-thinking rightists to walk away from Nixon in 1972. Many Goldwaterites and Reaganites viewed Nixon as a liberal appeaser, someone insufficiently devoted to the doctrine of small government. They were not wrong. Nixon played to what he perceived to be the liberal center of American politics. The divisive politics of Nixonland were tempered by the reality that liberals, however embattled, were far from dead, and Nixon, sometimes inadvertently, furthered many of their goals.

Ultimately, Perlstein's argument is one about culture, rhetoric and representation, and on those subjects he is utterly persuasive. Nixon's polarizing impact was profound and long-lasting. He governed in the center but ran to the right. The two Nixonian strategies—polarization and ratfucking—enabled the electoral triumph of the New Right. Even if he did not dismantle government, he delegitimized it, blaming liberal elites for betraying the public trust while betraying it himself. Watergate brought Nixon's demise, but perversely, the scandals reinforced his core message that government could not be trusted. In 1960 Goldwater had launched his conservative insurgency by declaring that the greatest enemy of freedom was government. After Vietnam, Nixonian polarization and Watergate, Goldwater's antigovernment maxims were no longer marginal. For millions of ordinary Americans, they became conventional wisdom.

No one suffered the consequences of polarization more than the losing candidate in 1972, George McGovern. He was a plain-talking, strait-laced war hero who had won the support of plain-speaking South Dakota farmers. "I can present liberal values in a conservative, restrained way," asserted McGovern. "I see myself as a politician of reconciliation." Known for his fundamental decency, McGovern, a man of principle, an "antipolitician," pledged to govern from the middle. He hoped to heal divisions, he never supported acid or even the legalization of marijuana, and he was hostile to abortion, which he thought was a matter best left to the states. But McGovern's actual positions did not matter once Nixon ran him through the thresher. The fact that the Yippies endorsed McGovern and that the Democratic delegates, despite McGovern's pleading for "moderation," demanded floor votes on then-controversial issues like gay liberation, only added fuel to the fire. Nixon—a President whose policies had been profoundly antilabor—found himself the beneficiary of the AFL-CIO's decision not to endorse McGovern, for, in George Meany's words, the "Democratic Party has been taken over by people named Jack who look like Jills and smell like johns." The McGovern my classmates sent to resounding defeat in 1972—and the McGovern of their parents' nightmares—was not a real man. He was a spectral creation of the politics of polarization, the ultimate Franklin who haunted the dreams of bitter working-class whites and God-fearing Middle Americans. Various similar specters have haunted national politics ever since. Forty years after 1968, will they ever be laid to rest? ■

TIM SHAFFER/REUTERS

Philadelphia Phillies fans anticipating the team's 10,000th loss at a home game, July 15, 2007

Seam Stress

by ANDREW RICE

On the afternoon of October 27, 2006, the day that year's World Series reached its soggy conclusion, a nervous fan of the St. Louis Cardinals sat in front of a computer to compose his thoughts. The series had been a desultory affair, most notable for the number of fielding errors committed by the vaunted Detroit Tigers pitching staff in the process of coughing up three unsightly losses. The Cardinals were not the favored team—they'd finished the regular season with a lukewarm eighty-three wins, whereas the Tigers had won ninety-five games, their highest season total in nineteen years—but to the fan at his computer, it scarcely mattered. St. Louis had a chance to win the series that night, in

Andrew Rice's first book, The Teeth May Smile but the Heart Does Not Forget, *about a Ugandan murder trial, will be published by Metropolitan next year.*

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Game Five, and he was holding a ticket. Before heading to the ballpark with his father and mother, the fan thought about his first Cardinals game, in 1982, when he was 6.

"Rookie Willie McGee hit a triple, Tommy Herr homered and Ozzie Smith made one of his acrobatic, Matrix-like plays at shortstop, and the Cardinals won," wrote the fan, Will Leitch, in a post on Deadspin, his immensely popular sports blog. That first game, Leitch reflected in the mock-heroic first-person plural, grew into a childhood obsession—"You do not want to know how many different Topps cards of Dane Iorg we had"—and his fandom, in turn, ripened into an adult career. St. Louis won the National League pennant in 1982 and edged the Milwaukee Brewers (then an American League team) in a tense seven-game series showdown. "And here we are, tonight, with the Cardinals playing at home with a chance to win the World Series…for the first time since 1982," Leitch wrote. "We will be at Busch Stadium, with our parents, hoping to jump and cheer and dance. Nothing about our life is the same as it was when we were seven—except for this. If that's not an example of why sports matters, and why we gleefully give up so much of our lives for it, we don't know what is."

When baseball writing—good baseball writing—isn't simply about baseball, it often touches on themes of mortality. In his famous essay "The Green Fields of the Mind," the late commissioner and Renaissance literature scholar A. Bartlett Giamatti wrote that the season "begins in the spring, when everything else begins again, and it blossoms in the summer, filling the afternoons and evenings, and then as soon as the chill rains come, it stops and leaves you to face the fall alone." Less poetically, the game demonstrates, again and cruelly again, the way the body inevitably betrays us. A baseball career is a life span compressed: a player is drafted at 18, reaches maturity at 25, is seasoned by 30 and at 35 is contemplating an afterlife on the golf course. It's no coincidence, I think, that the greatest book about baseball by a player—Jim Bouton's *Ball Four* (1970)—is the diary of a journeyman pitcher's dispiriting final full season, while the most esteemed work of baseball fiction—Bernard Malamud's *The Natural* (1952)—is a fable about an aging slugger, loosely based on the medieval fertility myth of Percival and the Fisher King. In these books, promise fades, arms fail and fleeting glory can't alter the doleful trajectory of all existence. Yet longtime fans take comfort in the game's perennial cycles of renewal. Players come and go, but team loyalties remain, providing a pleasing continu-

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For many years men have awaited, impatiently to be sure, evidence that Maitreya* does in truth exist, and carries out his work among us. Why this doubt should for so long persist is, perhaps, difficult to understand, given the vast transformations of our world which have clearly taken place, each one foretold by Maitreya, and made available to the public and world media. What prevents the acceptance – even as a hypothesis – that such a welcome event has indeed transpired?

"The media of the world know every facet of this information, however little they inform the public of its nature."

The media of the world know every facet of this information, however little they inform the public of its nature. Many of its representatives have met Maitreya, have heard him speak, and yet stay silent themselves.

Laws

Why should this be so? What inhibits the public announcement of this welcome news? In the main the problem is fear: fear of ridicule, fear of disbelief; fear of loss, of their status or jobs; fear that they are somehow beguiled, that they did not see what they saw or hear what they heard. It is easier to set their experiences aside and to leave it to Maitreya himself – if he does indeed exist – to come forward and show the world his factual presence.

This view, logical enough to those who thus wait silently, shows little understanding of the Laws which govern the appearance of a Teacher of Maitreya's stature.

Many worthy Teachers come into our lives, do their work, and cause few ripples on the surface of men's thought and action. They seldom need forerunners to prepare their way. Maitreya, however, is the World Teacher, Head of Hierarchy, and intends to serve as such for the next world cycle. His impact on humanity cannot be comprehended. His coming is a truly momentous happening, which must be prepared for beforehand, and adequately explained to men of every station.

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*This article, published in *Share International* magazine, was written by a Master of Wisdom. The Masters, headed by Maitreya, the World Teacher, are highly advanced teachers and advisors of humanity who are planning to work openly in the world very soon.

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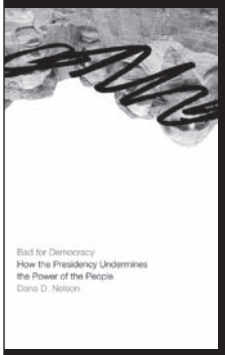

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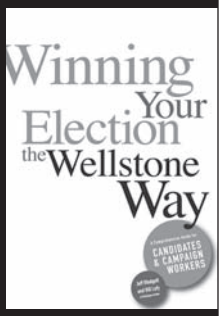

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ity to the disjointed narratives of our lives.

Fandom, with all its mortifications and consolations, is the subject of two new books, one a touching memoir and the other a jokey manifesto. The respective authors, Nicholas Dawidoff and Will Leitch, approach the subject with different tones and styles. In *The Crowd Sounds Happy*, Dawidoff, a former Pulitzer Prize finalist, compares the story of his love for the Red Sox to a Chekhov play, "where the impending sorrow was tolerable because it was related with such beautiful ennui." Leitch, who made his name as a blogger, is considerably more irreverent: the cover of his book, *God Save the Fan*, features an illustration of one of those enormous foam fingers goofy spectators wave, except the finger that's extended is the… well, you get the idea. What the two books share, however, is the basic assumption that it is perfectly reasonable for an intelligent person to devote large portions of his conscious attention to the fortunes of a bunch of men in colorful hats who wave sticks at a white speck and run around in circles.

The Crowd Sounds Happy
A Story of Love, Madness, and Baseball.
By Nicholas Dawidoff.
Pantheon. 271 pp. $24.95.

God Save the Fan
How Preening Sportscasters, Athletes Who Speak in the Third Person, and the Occasional Convicted Quarterback Have Taken the Fun Out of Sports (and How We Can Get It Back).
By Will Leitch.
Harper. 295 pp. $24.95.

The Mitchell Report
Report to the Commissioner of Baseball of an Independent Investigation Into the Illegal Use of Steroids and Other Performance Enhancing Substances by Players in Major League Baseball.
By George Mitchell.
Major League Baseball. 409 pp.
mlb.mlb.com/mlb/news/mitchell/index.jsp

Recalling childhood broadcasts of games on the radio, Dawidoff writes,

> It seemed to me then that baseball could grow time, that its endlessly digressive nature made it not so much immediate as an activity in dialogue with immediacy. Each game might, in theory, continue forever, until it didn't. Naturally, I wanted the Red Sox to win, but, if I could have wished for anything, it would have been for this game that was played at a lifelike, real-time pace to last and last, to go ahead and become life, for it never to end and send me back into my room again, back to the world's deficiencies.

Or, as Leitch puts it: "Life is hard. Sports are where we go to hide."

The world's deficiencies, however, have a way of catching up to the game. Baseball is currently going through one of its periodic integrity crises. Last December an investigatory commission headed by George Mitchell, the former US senator from Maine, released a report on the use of steroids and other performance-enhancing substances by major-league players. As even casual fans know, Mitchell implicated several superstars, including Barry Bonds, the holder of both the single-season and career home run records, and Roger Clemens, arguably the greatest right-handed pitcher since World War II. The investigation marked the culmination of an ugly period of public disgraces, grand jury indictments and Congressional hearings. The self-appointed custodians of baseball, a Greek chorus of politicians, league executives and newspaper columnists (inside and outside the sports pages), now condemn those players who defied the rules of mortality, altering their body chemistries to artificially increase their strength and prolong their careers. The defendants stand accused of endangering the game by toying with its very nature.

For the past few years, I've made a trip down to Clearwater, Florida, in March to watch my team, the Philadelphia Phillies, play a few spring training games. I do it for all those hackneyed, soppy reasons that are nonetheless true: I like to put aside more somber writing subjects and to escape the cold of New York; most of all, I like spending a few days with my father, who always drives down from my hometown in South Carolina. We go to the games early, watch batting practice, get acquainted with the roster. There are the mainstays—Jimmy Rollins, our puckish shortstop; Ryan Howard, our mountainous first baseman; Pat Burrell, our lothario in left—and there are a smattering of newcomers acquired in the off-season. In the late innings of the games, the manager pulls the regulars out and the fans get a chance to see the future, the young prospects who are just proving their talents, and the past, a few faded players who are competing to hang on to the end of the bench, trying to show they still have a swing or an arm good enough to keep them in the game. Those "veterans" are actually around my age, but somehow they still look grizzled and creaky to me.

I often say that my Phillies allegiance is a hereditary disease carried on the Y chromosome. According to geography, I should have

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been an Atlanta Braves fan, like all my friends growing up. Had that happened, I could have spent my 20s smugly rooting for a first-place team. Instead, following the lead of my dad, who's from Delaware, I chose the Phillies, and frustration. In its 125-year history, the franchise has won only one World Series, in 1980, when I was slightly too young to appreciate it. Last year, the Phillies made the playoffs, and this season, as of mid-August—based on past experience, I hesitate even to write these words—they sat atop the National League's Eastern Division. But for most of my life, and for most of my father's, and for most of my grandfather's, and for most of my great-grandfather's—all of them Phillies fans—the team has been lousy. I mean, world-historically bad.

Other teams have their traditions of failure—like the Chicago Cubs, who last won the World Series in 1908, and the Pittsburgh Pirates, who haven't finished the season with a winning record since George H.W. Bush was President—but for sheer, crapulous volume, no team loses like mine. Last July I watched the Phillies suffer the 10,000th loss in franchise history, a nationally televised 10–2 drubbing, apparently establishing some kind of record for futility that spans all sports. Other teams redeem themselves by losing lovably (the Cubs) or tragically (the Red Sox, until recently), but the Phillies tend to lose with such miserable ill humor that no one feels sorry. In his book, which includes several satirical "glossary" sections, Leitch defines a Phillies fan this way:

> Hates everything about the team, including the fans. Does everything possible to make sure playing for the Phillies is a miserable experience, and then excoriates anyone who might deign to play for a franchise and a fan base that makes baseball fun. Like the guy who is so mean to his girlfriend that he forces her to break up with him, then calls her a bitch for leaving him.

That's a bit harsh. I would say that when your team has lost more games than any other since the dawn of time, some pessimism is understandable. My father's most prized Phillies souvenir is a pristine ticket to Game One of the 1964 World Series, to be held at Philadelphia's long-gone Connie Mack Stadium. The ticket was printed at a point near the end of that season, when the Phillies held the National League lead by such a wide margin that a berth in the series seemed assured. But as soon as they went on sale, the Phillies imploded, squandering a six-and-a-half-game lead by losing ten of their last twelve. Game One of the World Series ended up being played in St. Louis by the Cardinals and the Yankees. My father has held on to his worthless ticket for more than forty years as a constant reminder of how sick and transitory glory can be.

Rooting for a winner is easy; living with loss is real life. Dawidoff, a Red Sox fan, describes the experience of standing in an office at his high school, surrounded by Yankees supporters, and watching his team blow the one-game playoff that gave the 1978 American League Eastern Division championship to New York—the game that featured Bucky Dent's storied pop-fly homer over the Green Monster in Fenway Park. "It was embarrassing to feel so humiliated in front of everyone, and to be made foolish by baseball," Dawidoff writes. And yet later on he says he came to feel "oddly consoled" by the team's "pursuit of failure," which seemed to mirror the difficulties of his own childhood.

> I was frustrated by their fuddled, fizzling breakdowns, just as I often was frustrated by my life, in which everybody close to me seemed either sick or dying or tormented with grief, and that commonality of experience made the wistful pleasures the Red Sox pro-

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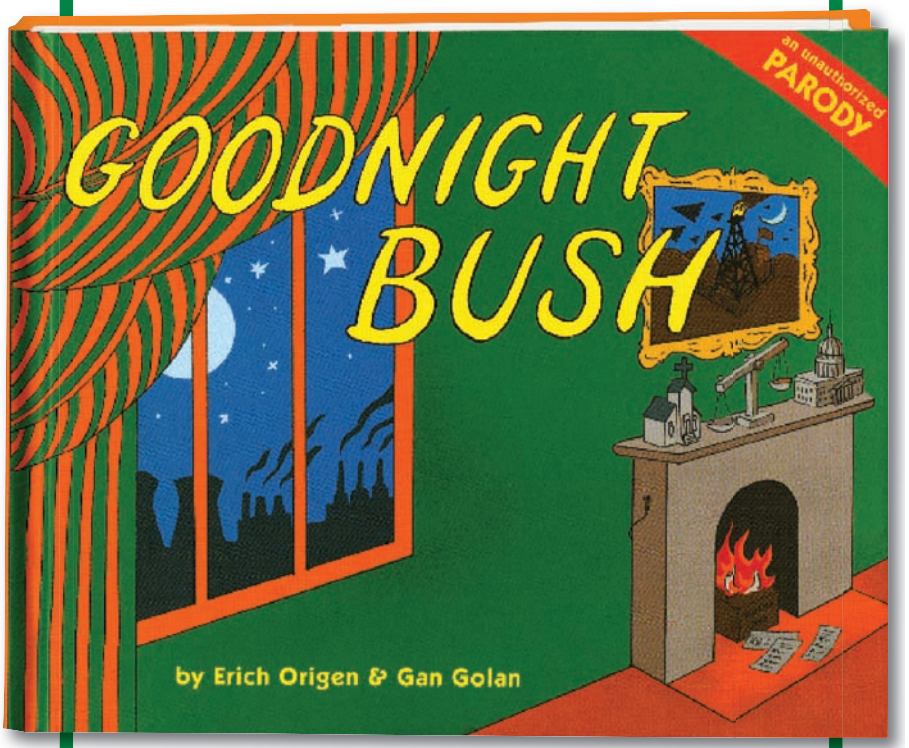

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vided accessible to me. At sixteen I had come to believe that nothing worthwhile comes without great suffering; there was deeper meaning to me in catastrophes.

Dawidoff is the author of three previous books, including *The Catcher Was a Spy* (1994), an outstanding biography of a Jewish ballplayer who moonlighted as an Office of Strategic Services operative. *The Crowd Sounds Happy* grew out of a *New Yorker* article he wrote about his father, a brilliant attorney who lost his mind. In the book, Dawidoff describes how his father, as a Harvard undergraduate, began seeing green-eared creatures that told him to give away all of his possessions. Donald Dawidoff stabilized for a while, long enough to finish law school, marry and start a family, but his creeping insanity ultimately drove his wife and children away. In his son's telling, baseball filled the paternal void.

'Most fans, deep down, don't really care about steroids that much,' writes Will Leitch.

The childhood memoir is a tough genre—no kid is really that insightful—and *The Crowd Sounds Happy* sometimes projects suspiciously adult insights onto Dawidoff's younger self. Yet it is hard to hold that against a book that's filled with so many passages of recognizable truth—and sadness, such as the scene in which Dawidoff's troubled father takes him to his first baseball game. It turned out to be a plodding fifteen-inning affair, and as night fell, Nicholas asked if they could go home. His father reproached him, saying, "A real fan stays for the whole game."

"Many years later," Dawidoff writes, "when I thought about what my father had said, it would occur to me that it was one of the last times he ever tried to impart wisdom to me. What to do when your father doesn't know best? If you were me, quietly you stopped asking him things."

The Crowd Sounds Happy culminates, as it must, with an account of the four games that changed everything for the Red Sox: the conclusion of the 2004 American League Championship Series. Down three games to none to the hated Yankees, a postseason deficit no baseball team had ever overcome, Boston reeled off a series of tense victories, two of them in extra innings, to force a decisive Game Seven. Dawidoff describes himself "pacing, trembling" as he listens on the radio, and confesses to feeling conflicted about the unfolding miracle—an emotional response shared by many Red Sox fans he knew. "Failure was the team's distinction, what made them unique—and it was the same with us," Dawidoff writes. "If we won, we'd lose our true selves."

Of course, Boston did beat the Yankees in Game Seven. The Red Sox have since won two World Series, banishing all talk of a curse. They've become boring—just another obnoxious juggernaut. In his concluding pages, Dawidoff seems to miss his old losing team. He even confesses an unlikely sympathy for Kevin Brown, the disagreeable former ace the Yankees sent to the mound to start that fateful Game Seven. Brown just couldn't summon the intimidating stuff that had once made him a star; he gave up five runs in just one-and-a-third innings. After the game, Dawidoff relates, the humbled pitcher told reporters, "I just wish I could have been the guy I used to be one more time."

Maybe he simply needed a new prescription. When George Mitchell released the results of his investigation into performance-enhancing drug use in baseball, Kevin Brown's name was among the most prominent ones mentioned. According to Kirk Radomski, a former Mets clubhouse attendant and confessed drug dealer, Brown was one of several players introduced to him by former all-star catcher Paul Lo Duca. In 2001, at a time when Brown was having injury trouble, the pitcher allegedly started buying human growth hormone, sending Radomski thousands of dollars in cash via overnight mail. Brown's drug use was apparent to the general manager of his team, the Los Angeles Dodgers. (Lo Duca was the team's catcher.) "Question what kind of medication he takes," read a 2003 internal assessment of Brown's performance, obtained and quoted by Mitchell. "Steroids speculated by GM."

It's no surprise to learn at this point that baseball insiders knew prominent players were using performance-enhancing drugs. Everyone could see it, including the fans. The evidence was right before our eyes. Mark McGwire, Sammy Sosa and Barry Bonds developed WWF physiques and mashed home runs at an undreamed-of pace. Scrappy middle infielders suddenly started hitting for power. Sportswriter Pat Jordan went to Texas to see Roger Clemens during his off-season training and ended up witnessing the weirdly tight bond between the pitcher and his trainer, Brian McNamee, whose life seemed "to revolve around the conditioning of Roger Clemens." In a resulting *New York Times Magazine* article, which was recently republished in *The Best Sports Writing of Pat Jordan*, Clemens asks McNamee's permission before he orders potatoes with dinner. It doesn't take much to imagine the trainer injecting a syringe of Winstrol into the pitcher's buttocks, as McNamee now claims he did, according to the Mitchell Report.

The press winked at the secret, writing about steroids in code. One year early in this decade, a Philadelphia sportswriter reported that one of the team's best players had arrived at spring training looking extraordinarily "bulked-up"—the product of "hard work, nothing more, in the weight room," the player claimed. He hit a lot of home runs that season. A decade earlier, Lenny Dykstra—the star of everyone's favorite Phillies team, the rowdy 1993 National League champs—returned from a winter of "training" with thirty added pounds of muscle and told reporters he'd been taking some "real good vitamins." When the Phillies won the 1993 pennant, a starting pitcher celebrated by ripping off his shirt on the mound and flexing his muscles like the Incredible Hulk. Another player had Popeye-sized biceps and was nicknamed Head because of his tendency to fly into blind rages. In retrospect, such behavior seems a tad suspicious, but it doesn't dim my affection for the 1993 Phillies team, the only one to make the World Series in my adult life. (They lost, in six games, to Toronto.)

Leitch, in one of the many perceptive essays in his book, writes that "most fans, deep down, don't really care about steroids that much." This is, needless to say, not the mainstream opinion. Now that the steroid secret is out, pundits have treated the scandal as a crisis akin to the fixed World Series of 1919 or the strike-ruined one of 1994. In a recent *New Republic* essay, bioethicists Leon Kass and Eric Cohen went even further, arguing that performance-enhancing drugs threaten to turn athletics into "a strange hybrid of dog racing, fantasy wrestling, and the circus freak show, with men and women programmed to perform at the highest levels that science makes possible." Maybe. But most fans I know would agree with Leitch: we're interested, but we don't really care. "This is not an instance of fans sticking their collective heads in the sand, as many sportswriters would like to perceive it," Leitch writes. "It's a matter of keeping our sports in perspective."

Perspective is Leitch's specialty. He is, in my opinion, one of the sharper and funnier sports columnists working today. Yet to some eminent members of the sportswriting fraternity—and that is the right word—he ap-

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parently represents the end of civilization. In a joint appearance several months ago on the HBO sports talk show *Costas Now*, Buzz Bissinger, the author of *Friday Night Lights* and several other fine books, unleashed a gale of profane invective at Leitch and the website he founded, which the elder journalist conceded he did not read with regularity. "I really think you're full of shit," Bissinger said, initiating an attack that was soon posted on YouTube and pinging into inboxes around the world. "I think the quality of the writing generally in blogs is generally despicable," Bissinger later added. "And yes, I say this as a writer who spent forty years of my life trying to perfect the craft."

Leitch is actually a consistently excellent writer, which is remarkable, considering how mentally exhausting it is to produce a half-dozen blog posts a day. It's true that Deadspin sometimes links to cellphone snapshots of athletes engaged in drunken lechery, that it eschews the euphemistic language of access-dependent sportswriting, that it sometimes makes a vulgar joke or pokes fun at some vainglorious broadcaster. It's true, in other words, that Deadspin is enjoyable—as sports are supposed to be. But *God Save the Fan* is about much more than baseball. Leitch, who got his start as a campus correspondent for the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, writes that traditional sports reporting is "a soul-crushing job that sucks all the fun out of sports." But on the Internet he can write like a fan. "The Web has helped shrink athletes down to our level," Leitch writes. "The days of Red Smith weaving tales of brilliance and assigning god-like qualities to the players are over."

Writing a book that declares the ascendancy of the Internet is an inherently ironic endeavor. Indeed, soon after *God Save the Fan* was published, Leitch announced he was leaving the site (which is owned by Gawker Media) to take a job at an old-fashioned glossy magazine, *New York*. As a result, the book reads a bit like a long farewell, even if the author couldn't have known he was writing one at the time. Though Leitch claims that only one passage is reprinted from Deadspin—an interview he conducted with John Rocker—the book nevertheless resembles, in tone and format, a blog committed to paper. The chapters are short, punchy and episodic, only loosely grouped into four larger thematic sections: "Players," "Owners, "Media" and "Fans." The tales Leitch spins about his favorite targets, such as ESPN's Chris Berman, will be familiar to anyone who often read Deadspin during his tenure there. What I find most endearing about the book, however, is the way Leitch skillfully manages to convey his love of sports while still putting that love in its proper place. "When you write about sports in a vacuum, spending all of your time with other sportswriters…you lose touch with how the rest of the planet works," he writes. "It's a fundamental concept: Sports *do not matter*."

Only, sometimes they do. Leitch describes, with not a bit of cynicism, the joy he felt as he sat in a Manhattan bar, surrounded by other expatriate Cardinals fans, and watched his team win a tight seventh-game victory over the Mets in the 2006 National League Championship Series. The World Series came next, and the Cardinals clinched it in five, with Leitch on hand at Busch Stadium to witness the final out. Months later, looking back on that game, Leitch wrote on his blog, "Time completely confuses me, because age is entirely backwards; I lose perspective on how much a singular event affects me as I get older, rather than gain it." But seeing the Cardinals win the World Series, for the first time since he was a boy, was different. "It's not that I'll never forget it; it's that its existence makes me wonder if, when all is said and done, and my nicotine addiction has finally caught up with me, it will be the only thing I remember."

In his book, Leitch reveals, without embarrassment, that during that postseason, someone recorded him dancing a victorious jig outside a bar and posted the video to the web. (You can find it on YouTube.) I can understand. Last year my Phillies made a charge down the stretch, and one afternoon, when second baseman Chase Utley singled home the winning run in an 11–10 victory over the league-leading Mets, I found myself dancing by myself in my apartment. (You cannot find a video of it on YouTube.) This is why I follow a child's game: because every so often, it transports me back to that childhood moment when nothing had happened before.

As long as it can provide that feeling, baseball will survive. But there is a cost to the steroids scandal, and it's there for anyone to see in the Mitchell Report. You have to dig through its 409 pages of assessment and appendices, past the names like Bonds and Clemens and the concerns about tainted records, and back into the dry recitation of the evidence against dozens of implicated players, many of them bench-warmers who seldom made the highlight reels. You can glimpse real tragedy in the story of someone like Chris Donnels, a reserve infielder who bounced through five major-league cities and a stint in Japan over the course of eleven years. He started using steroids and human growth hormone to recover from a

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string of injuries, and kept using them even after it became evident that he would never make it back to the big leagues. He just couldn't give up playing the game, not when his Triple-A team had a chance to make the playoffs. He told Mitchell that players like him used drugs "just to stay on the field, not to set records."

No one knows how historians will judge this era in baseball. Mark McGwire has thus far been denied election to the Hall of Fame, despite career statistics that merit it. Personally, I think that he and Bonds and Clemens and the rest should be enshrined in their own room—perhaps shaped like an asterisk?—alongside earlier outcasts like Pete Rose and Shoeless Joe Jackson. It's possible that the players who used drugs will continue to pay a high price, both in terms of public disdain and long-term health effects. I believe, however, that it's just as likely that we'll look back years from now and see the steroids scandal as quaint hysteria. Attitudes about bioethics have a way of changing according to self-interest. As the baby boom generation ages, we're likely to see new drugs and genetic therapies develop to slow the aging process, to enhance performance in the most important contest of all. Then we may no longer judge today's ballplayers so harshly. In the end, we all want the same thing: to stay on the field just a little longer. ■

ZEITGEIST FILMS

Kimberly and Scott Roberts outside their flood-damaged home in New Orleans

Closely Watched Water

by STUART KLAWANS

Two weeks after Hurricane Katrina devastated her house and nearly took her life, 24-year-old Kimberly Roberts at last realized the dream of so many New Orleans natives and broke into show business. She did it in Alexandria, Louisiana, in a sports arena that was serving as a Red Cross shelter. In the echoing cement-block lobby, where a team of documentarians were interviewing a relief worker, Kimberly and her husband, Scott, stepped forward with the assertive friendliness of Lower Ninth Ward street hustlers to mention that they, too, wanted a turn—but only because the filmmakers were a *New York* crew. "Ain't gone give this to nobody local," Kimberly said proudly about the story she was offering. "This got to be worldwide. All the stuff you been seein' on TV, ain't nobody got what I got. I got right *there* in the hurricane," and she brought her hands together in a box, miming the shape of a video camera.

She turned out to be as good as her word; and so to honor a moment that would alter Kimberly and Scott's lives and determine the course of the movie you're watching, Tia Lessin and Carl Deal have made this encounter the opening scene of their documentary *Trouble the Water*. A chance meeting moved the filmmakers to spend a year on and off with Kimberly and Scott: recording them on a foray back into the ruined Ninth Ward,

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accompanying their futile visit to a makeshift FEMA office in a shopping mall, traveling along as they relocated to a cousin's home in Memphis and finally returning with them to New Orleans when they decided to come home. Everything about their lives seems to have found its way into the film: the funeral of Kimberly's grandmother (one of the hospitalized people who were abandoned in the storm); Scott's regrets over his past career as a drug dealer ("I hated my life; it was horrible"); the hip-hop songs that Kimberly had hoped would make her fortune, and that are now worked into the movie's soundtrack ("Introducing the music of Black Kold Madina"). But above all, *Trouble the Water* makes use of Kimberly's video recordings, which have earned her a co-credit as the film's director of photography.

Only a quarter of an hour of Kimberly's material appears in *Trouble the Water*, out of a running time of ninety-six minutes; but it so dominates the rest that the film will surely be known as the *Blair Witch Project* of Hurricane Katrina documentaries. The comparison involves more than the distorted, front-lit close-up of Kimberly's face, grayed-out and floating in a nocturnal void—the darkness not of a forest but of the attic where she'd taken refuge during the hurricane. Nor does the *Blair Witch* analogy stop with your sense of trespassing into someone else's viewpoint as she haphazardly glimpses chaos engulfing her: water rising through the windows, water dripping through the roof, water filling the street to the level of the stop sign on the corner, while more water pelts from the sky and the wind riles the surface of the newly made lake. The most important similarity is that Kimberly seems to have conceived of her video as a self-contained movie, with a setting, a cast of characters and a narrative that risked ending abruptly in midhorror.

On the day before the storm hit, Kimberly brought out her recently purchased video camera and began recording for the first time in her life, veering immediately between the enthusiasm of a hobbyist and the gravity of a documentarian. First came some impromptu traveling shots of her kitchen floor and her dogs; then a steady, composed view through a chain-link fence of National Guard trucks rumbling past her house. Climbing onto her bicycle, she toured the Ninth Ward's streets, visiting a corner market and interviewing the unevacuated neighbors: little girls playing on the sidewalk, a drunk who'd passed out on a stoop. Later, as the wind intensified and the rain began, she framed a view through a row of deserted front porches—a crumbling arcade, you'd think, painted the color of darkening blood—and spoke of God's anger. "We need the Lord to spare our lives. We all do. This is Black Kold Madina, reporting live."

There's more, all of it this powerful, but not that much more. The camera's battery was good for only two hours of recording. So the decision to use Kimberly's truncated movie posed a double challenge to Lessin and Deal: how to supplement this footage, to give a picture of the storm that's more comprehensive but still feels firsthand; and how to expand beyond the storm, to narrate Kimberly and Scott's wanderings in the following days and months.

The answer to the first challenge came the hard way, from eclectic archival research and long hours in the editing room. (You will understand the layered effect when you know that Lessin, Deal and editor T. Woody Richman all worked on *Fahrenheit 9/11*.) The second challenge was answered by the personalities of Kimberly and Scott, and of a gentle soul named Brian who'd been tossed into their lives and hadn't left. A lanky recovering addict with deep religious convictions, Brian appears in the film as sideman and foil, clinging to his more robust friends as if they were flotation devices. Give him credit for good judgment. The affable Scott may have a dandyish streak, as suggested by his well-cultivated curls and squared-off goatee; but he also has a scar on his left cheek, from mouth to ear, and in the wake of Katrina he knew how to escape New Orleans by scrounging a panel truck. (The film leaves the details obscure, which I suspect is just as well.) As for Kimberly, she seems at first to be all pugnacious jaw and boisterous, self-dramatizing gestures, until you see her sheltering half a dozen neighbors in the midst of the storm. These are good companions to carry you through a film; and for all they suffer, you're not surprised when they end their journey a little better off than they began.

That's not the case for the Ninth Ward in general, as Lessin and Deal are at pains to show. In overview, *Trouble the Water* documents, as other films have done, the fatal indifference of officialdom toward the poor and black of New Orleans, whether that lack of concern was exposed through newscast sound bites or through the casual scoffing of a young, white National Guardsman: "Civilians have no conception how to survive." And yet the few civilians you see here in intimate view refused to cooperate in their own demise. As *Trouble the Water* so movingly reveals, some people in New Orleans could emphatically survive—and they were always ready for their close-up.

It comes with movie in-jokes, slapstick gun battles, a blackface Robert Downey Jr. and much pre-emptive publicity, in case the

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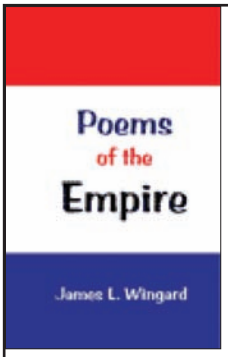

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people it insults should somehow feel offended. *Tropic Thunder* is *exactly* the summer comedy your *Nation* reviewer wants to see. But since it was not available for viewing by press time, here are notes on some other comic movies that have now been released, immediately following the comic-book ones.

I Served the King of England leads my list, because it's the most brilliantly, expertly cinematic of the summer's comedies, without fundamentally being funny at all. Directed by the venerable but ever lively Jiri Menzel (*Closely Watched Trains*) and based on a novel by Bohumil Hrabal, it takes the form of the reminiscences, some of them perhaps fanciful, of grizzled, late-middle-aged Jan Díte (Oldrich Kaiser), who is introduced, circa 1963, as he's being released from a jail in Prague. For fifteen years, he's been imprisoned as a class enemy of the Communist regime. Before that, he was a waiter. As the soundtrack comes alive with music (*vivace!*), Jan recalls himself when young, lithe, blond and Chaplinesque: an alert little fellow (Ivan Barnev) eager to make money and eager to woo the girls, and buoyantly lucky with both. If the girls were mostly prostitutes, if the money wasn't always honest, if advancement sometimes came by giving a rival a surreptitious, Chaplinesque kick, well, the world was still magically lovely and bright. This was before Jan's marriage to a proud German from the Sudetenland (Julia Jentsch)—at last, love with a short woman!—followed by a bit of collaboration with the Nazis. The images become darker in this wartime section, the tone more acidly comic; while in the present-day frame story, old Jan lives in forest shadow, as the proprietor of an abandoned rustic inn visited mostly by his memories. Alternating astonishment and laughter with rueful smiles, *I Served the King of England* is a deft fable about petty ambitions and enormous crimes, youthful vanity and mature resignation—and, not least, about beautiful young women and dirty old men. You could resist it, but I don't know why you'd try.

Resistance is also futile in the face of Andrew Fleming's *Hamlet 2*, the movie that shows how an American life *can* have a second act, provided its author knows no embarrassment. Steve Coogan, all teeth and hectic sincerity, stars as Dana, the drama teacher at Tucson's West Mesa High School: a recovering alcoholic and former infomercial actor who mounts his own stage adaptations of inspirational movies (*Erin Brockovich*, say) in a corner of the cafeteria. Dana strenuously pretends to be happy in these circumstances, perhaps because his wife (Catherine Keener, with belladonna bubbling deep in her throat) is unhappy enough for two. Then comes the complication. The funding for all arts classes is eliminated—this news is delivered in front of a vast display case of athletic trophies—so that Dana, as the school's sole remaining arts teacher, is suddenly responsible not just for his two chronic drama students but for a cafeteria full of aggressively bored Chicano kids, who have been dumped from other classes. Faced with this challenge, Dana resolves to save his soul, and maybe the arts program, by writing and directing a rock musical sequel to *Hamlet*. Middle-aged desperation, pedagogical vanity and an acting technique apparently modeled on Liza Minnelli conspire to create a play so grandiosely self-revelatory that it gives new meaning to "theater of cruelty"; but that's not the best joke in *Hamlet 2*. What's really funny is that a bleached, flat, fictitious Tucson, inhabited by a central character of perfect obliviousness, should toss up enough incidental amusements for a Preston Sturges movie: evangelicals, bikers, an adolescent drama critic, Amy Poehler (as an ACLU lawyer), Elisabeth Shue (as Elisabeth Shue) and an entire Gay Men's Chorus, among others. Ideas for the script seem to have flown in from all directions, but screen credit goes to Fleming and *South Park* veteran Pam Brady, which should give you some idea.

While Coogan, with utter flappability, embodies the self-involved American man in a centrifugal comedy, the stolid Matt Boren portrays much the same type in a comedy that's inward, quasi-documentary and surprisingly touching: Azazel Jacobs's *Momma's Man*. Set in wintry Lower Manhattan, the film tells the story of Mikey, a 30-ish businessman with a wife and newborn daughter, who comes to New York to visit his parents and somehow can't leave. The catch is that Mikey's puzzled and concerned folks are played by the filmmaker's own parents, Flo Jacobs (a painter) and Ken Jacobs (a grand old man of avant-garde cinema); the apartment where Mikey traps himself is the Jacobs's actual loft, a vast bohemian nest and workshop so intricately crammed that it brings to mind a set from *Solaris*; and Mikey's main occupation—filling up time, with almost nothing to do—is also the method of the movie. *Momma's Man* is minimalist, observational comedy taken to the limit, with wonderful success. It works so well, I think, because it's unsparing toward Mikey; but whenever it lights Flo Jacobs's face, it's rapt with love.

As for the latest big-budget comedy about ne'er-do-well American men—Seth Rogen and James Franco in this case—as issued from the Judd Apatow factory, *Pineapple Express* deserves a review in its own style. Imagine my face frozen in close-up, eyes goggled and mouth agape, as I scream: *No!* ■

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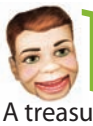
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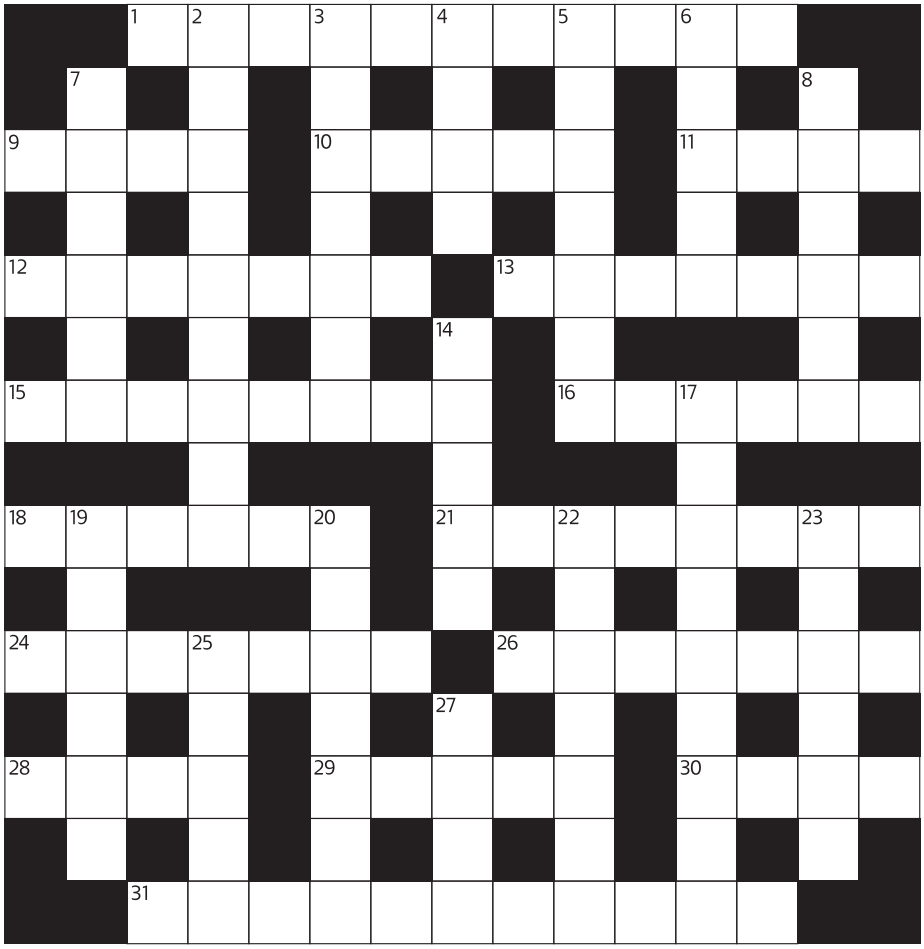

ACROSS

1 How you might find some stands in the park, if really wild! (4,7)

9 and **10** First class, as Fido might get to sniff things out. (2,2,5)

11 The thing the unknowing are in. (4)

12 Foreign money found in most of Florida, and a couple of other points. (7)

13 Mean! Ink, as they say, if your head is tacked on. (7)

15 The better type might be found here, to closely follow what the train is on. (3,5)

16 Concerning old songs and poetry, you might find them on the last part of 15. (6)

18 The song comes back to be with mystical knowledge. (6)

21 How you sometimes can't get a word in, if knowledgeable about the slight advantage. (8)

24 The one of Samothrace celebrated such winning ways when the old theatre troupe gets conservative. (7)

26 He who founded the city of Thebes was a low-down scoundrel, and real nasty! (7)

28 They really get turned on as a team! (4)

29 Intimidated to marry each other? (5)

30 If you're worried about something, they say everything will come out in it, according to Shaw, possibly. (4)

31 Knowing what to do in Paris? (6-5)

DOWN

2 A philosopher who could show another philosopher how to start his will. (9)

3 Praise be! (Has on an otherwise different appearance, too!) (7)

4 and **14** They were smiling at me in tune. (4,5)

5 If confused, infer it from a rather slangy description of the more worthwhile. (7)

6 A place not far from Salt Lake where you get to go up to study. (5)

7 Taking a public vote ends up with nothing, according to the old god. (6)

8 It once meant skillful—now it has a more sly meaning. (6)

14 See 4

17 Could be either the man or the machine, but the sward is all the better for it. (4-5)

19 Gave out the rumor that it could be onside? (6)

20 Title given the little company up and down—but it's just a big blow! (7)

22 Could be associated with Moses, and a slangy note hurried crazy-mad to make it! (7)

23 A point in your extra wheel covering could be rather hard to find. (6)

25 Possibly stale output from a physicist and inventor. (5)

27 Were wrong, but could hold water. (4)

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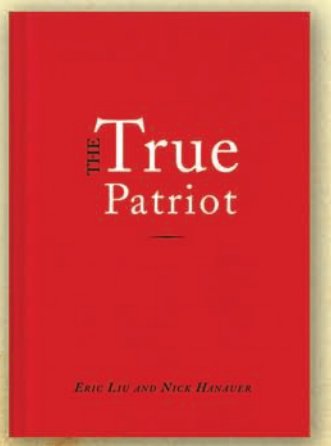

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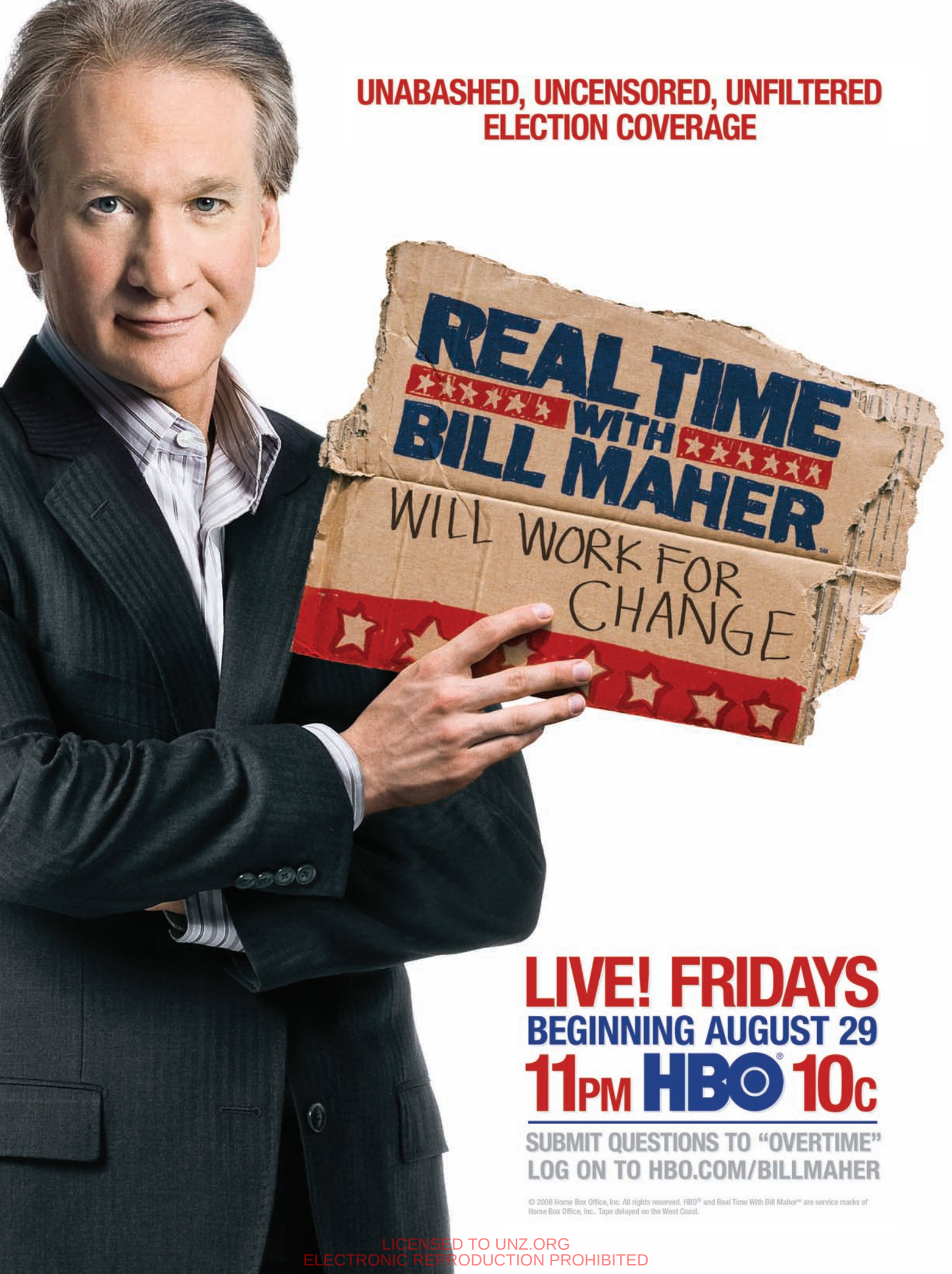
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